



Empowerment is a buzz word used extensively. In organisations it refers to changes aiming to give more power to people at lower levels.

This often involves getting employees to take more responsibility, to gain more skills and knowledge, to do a wider range of tasks. It also requires them to make decisions, participate more and to make suggestions.

These changes often lead to high levels of stress, fear and concern in employees who may not be used to more responsibility, training or power.

Many employees react negatively to empowerment programs because they have not made necessary internal mindset changes to cope with the changed requirements existing in today's workplace. If the internal changes are not in place, then the external changes will not work well.

1. Be Constructive

Behaviours commonly found in organisations are complaining, criticising, cynicism about the organisation's management, goals and/or procedures.

The problem with this sort of thinking is that it is self-fulfilling. If you constantly think that things are negative, they may actually become so.

So one of the most important ways to empower yourself is to be more constructive in the way in which you view things. Being constructive means making suggestions, participating, realising that you have views, thoughts, ideas, and suggestions which are useful. Being constructive means to express those views, have your say, and to get your message across.

2. Change Yourself First

At work, employees may be unhappy or dissatisfied with the behaviour of someone else; boss, a team leader, a customer, or a workmate.

Generally, if we are unhappy, we expect others to change. This technique does not usually work very well, because they don't change, rather they expect us to change.

A way of gaining more power in this situation, and therefore empowering yourself, is to be prepared to change yourself first. This often brings the desired change in others.

3. Be Open to Feedback

'Continuous improvement' is a term that is being used more and more. This means that everybody's performance from the very top of the organisation right down to the lowest level is open to review.

All employees should be prepared to receive feedback about their performance. This feedback may be both positive, about things done well, and negative feedback about things that could be done better.

Most of us are not very good at receiving feedback, particularly if it is negative. We get defensive or embarrassed. We argue back. We get resistant.

A key way of empowering yourself is to be open to feedback. To be open, listen carefully, try to understand what is being said, and be prepared to change behaviour in the light of feedback.

4. Focus on Results

All too often, particularly in team situations and meetings, the goal gets lost in a sea of discussion and words. A key way of empowering yourself and your team is to focus on results. This means sticking to the task, staying clear about the goal that is being sought, and regularly monitoring progress.

By consciously practising these four mindset changes, very quick, dramatic results can be achieved in how we feel about external changes. Only then can genuine organisational change really occur.

Notes from the video training package, *Empower Yourself*, produced by Ash.Quarry Productions and distributed by Seven Dimensions, telephone +61 3 9686 9677, www.7dimensions.com.au.