

EMPOWERMENT

A popular theme of the past two decades is that of an *empowered work force*. For some managers and, for that matter, some non-managers, this idea borders on being frightening. The fact is empowerment does not always produce positive results. The very idea of empowerment implies “decision making” and decision making requires knowledge about a variety of things that impact the choices we make. We can divide the knowledge we need into two general categories: alternatives and principles. The alternatives are simply the choices we have available. The principles are the framework or ground rules by which we are to operate. Discovering the alternatives is sometimes simply a matter of checking with various references and it is an obvious thing to do. Learning the organization’s principles is more difficult and not everyone appreciates the need to discover the principles. In a typical organization, it is the responsibility of the individual contributor to do the needed research so that the alternatives can be given consideration. It is the responsibility of management to communicate the principles by which the organization is to operate.

As Dr. J. Juran and other have taught, most of the problems an organization has can be traced to a failure of management to do their job. If “empowerment” fails to achieve the best results, then it is probably a result of the individual contributors not being told (or not having learned) the basic principles by which the organization must operate. If the people in the organization have bought into the basic truth principles of what it takes to make the organization successful – whatever these are – then empowerment works. Otherwise, empowerment without principles with which to guide the empowered person results in chaos.

Consider an example of a person working as a salesman for a company. The company “empowers” the sales person to pick out a “company car.” The salesman researches the alternatives and picks a Rolls Royce. When the company gets the bill for \$175,000, chaos results. They then tell the sales person, “We forgot to tell you a basic tenet about selecting a car. We thought you would know, but we now realize our mistake. You must limit your purchase to cars costing less than \$30,000.” The salesman then goes out and buys an Acura Vigor sedan for a modest price of \$25,000 and again, chaos results. Management then tells him, “We forgot to

tell you another basic tenet about selecting a car: it must be American made.” The next car the salesman purchased was a Buick Riviera for \$29,500. Chaos strikes again. “No, no, all salesmen’s cars must be four-door because of the difficulty of customers getting in and out of the back seat of a two-door car.” You get the picture. We learn the basic ground rules of most organization only after you break them.

The idea of empowerment has been around since the Garden of Eden. The possibility of being empowered was the very thing the serpent used to tempt Eve to disobey God and eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree. The ultimate in empowerment is to be as God is. One of the attributes ascribed to God is that He is omnipotent; that is, He is all powerful. The serpent said to Eve, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing (*determining for yourself*) good and evil.” (Gen 3:5, NIV) (Parenthesis added.)

Is it a legitimate desire for humans to want to be like God? There is ample evidence in Scripture that being like God is not only legitimate, but we are commanded to become as He is. In fact, Jesus said quite plainly, “Be ye, therefore, perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” We find also that God uses circumstances in our lives to bring about a transformation of every person who has experienced the new birth. The goal of this transformation is that we will be conformed to the image of (be like) Jesus Christ. (Roman 8:28 and 29)

Many Christians want to be as God is--a legitimate desire--however, they want to be as He is with regard to power, knowledge, etc. Recall that “empowerment without principles with which to guide the empowered person results in chaos.” The **principle** with which we need to identify is that of being *as God is* with regard to holiness, righteousness, love, etc. Once we have “bought into” (are walking in) these principles, then God will empower with the other things. When a person is principle-center, then satisfaction is derived from the relationship that this brings (being one with Christ) and not from what he can do.