



## Yielding Power to Empower Others

Think about being on a highway on-ramp in a busy city, at an intersection with no stop signs or in a line forming at the movies. When someone says, “No, you go first,” with a smile and gesture, you may think how remarkable and rare that action is. To yield is to give way.

Similarly, in many workplaces, yielding is all too rare. It could be because managers want to hang on to their power or prestige once they have it. Or perhaps they've never had a manager who empowered them, so they're not sure how it works. They may have learned to micromanage from the boss who never seemed to trust them, looked over their shoulders, and closely inspected every aspect of the work as they did it.

Exit interviews reveal that micromanagement does not work for most talented employees. Yielding does work. When you yield to your employees, you empower them to think for themselves, to be more creative, more enthusiastic and probably more productive. Your employees' enthusiasm and sense of value as team members will increase the odds that they will stay engaged and stick around.

### Who's got the right of way?

You may be convinced that you could benefit by giving more power to your employees yet find it difficult to know where to start. The rules can be fuzzy or hard to remember, just like the road rules that guide merging into a roundabout or crossing an intersection that has no stop signs.

In the matter of powering down to your employees, the uncertainty is even greater because there are no rules. Your organization establishes cultural norms and role models, but as an individual manager, you have tremendous leeway to give power.

Here are some guidelines for empowering your people:

**Stop micromanaging.** Micromanagement kills creativity and stifles learning. Let go. Stop looking over people's shoulders. Ask them what level of inspection, critique or control they want you to use as you manage them. And encourage them to call you

out when you haven't delegated something you should. Negotiate ways to get quality work done while letting them do it their way.

**Trust your employees to come up with the answers.** Take the time to encourage new ideas, good and bad. Even if you would have done something another way, consider the approaches they create, and support them all the way.

**Manage your reactions when you yield and they crash!** Powering down and yielding are sometimes risky, and failures will happen. Instead of punishing, collaborate with your empowered employees to learn from the mistake. Focus on what they could do differently next time around, rather than the rearview-mirror approach of what they should have done. A colleague put it this way: "Trust me, then teach me."

**Serve your employees.** Be a resource to them. Yielding doesn't mean you take the next exit. Empowerment spells disaster in too many cases where the manager tosses decisions and workloads at his employees and then moves on to bigger things. The "No Answers" approach works only if you are willing to brainstorm with them when they are stumped and to give them guidance and feedback along the way.

**See them as colleagues, not just subordinates.** Show it by occasionally doing work that may seem "beneath you." Working side by side with your employees will strengthen your relationships and increase their respect for you.

**Include everyone.** Your team is no doubt diverse and might include those from different generations, cultural or educational backgrounds, communication styles and more. They will no doubt react differently to this empowerment shift you're making. Yielding might terrify a young employee from a traditional patriarchal or hierarchical culture. Ask how you can help this employee take on more decision making, creating or leading.

**Listen to and use their ideas.** People want a seat at the table. They will tend to withhold their ideas and take less initiative to make improvements when decisions are made without their input. They might be talking, but are you really listening? Effective listening to the ideas, perspectives and opinions from your diverse team is not only respectful but also profoundly productive. If you want to engage and retain your talent, give up the need to be right, hide your phone (from you), clear your mind, and really listen.

Yielding will increase the odds of retaining your best people. As you give people more power to create, make decisions and truly affect the success of the team, their job satisfaction (and your odds of keeping them) will go up. At the same time, your ability to compete successfully and accomplish your business goals will increase. You have phenomenal power to yield. Try it, and see what happens.

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