"The message is clear, to the point, and right on target."

—Joseph Bode. Black & Decker Corporation

"I found the book was to the point and hit the nail on the head about information sharing."

—Robert S. Argabright, II, President and General Manager, Chesapeake Packaging Company

"Succinctly captures the critical elements of empowerment in a brilliantly simple format!"

—Peter Grazier, President, Teambuilding, Inc.

"The authors show that empowerment is more than an empty promise. A must-read for liberating the leader within people."

—Barry Z. Posner, coauthor of *The Leadership Challenge* **and** *Credibility*

" "The framework is perfect, clear, and concise."

— JoAnne Pitera, Principal Consultant, Organizational Effectiveness, The Southern Company

" "The material is most readable, and the key points are presented well for retention and use."

— Mike Perry, DuPont Corporation

" "Very readable. Straightforward. I think you have hit the bull's eye."

— John Coleman, CSX Corporation

" "Empowerment is such an important topic. The best part of the book is the Game Plan for getting there!"

— Bruce Dalgleish, General Mills Restaurants

Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute

*E*mpowerment
Takes More
Than a
Minute

Ken Blanchard
John P. Carlos & Alan Randolph

Dedication

to . . .

Dorothy Blanchard
Donald L. and Isabella Carlos
Wallace Randolph

who taught us so much about being empowered

F ew changes in business have been so well received yet so problematic as the movement to create empowered, employee-driven work environments. Empowerment offers the potential for tapping into a wellspring of underutilized human capacity that must be harnessed if organizations are to survive in today's increasingly complex and dynamic world.

Empowered employees benefit the organization and themselves. They have a greater sense of purpose in their jobs and lives, and their involvement translates directly into continuous improvement in the workplace systems and processes. In an empowered organization, employees bring their best ideas and initiatives to the workplace with a sense of excitement, ownership, and pride. In addition, they act with responsibility and put the best interests of the organization first.

The traditional management model of the manager in control and employees under control is no longer effective. To create an empowered workplace, management's role in organizations must move from a command-and-control mind-set to a responsibility-oriented and supportive environment in which all employees have the opportunity to do their best.

Shifting to an empowerment philosophy calls for changes in most aspects of an organization. Both managers and employees must learn, first, not to be bureaucratic and second, to be empowered. Unfortunately, many managers do not understand that empowerment involves releasing the power people already have, nor do they understand how to navigate the journey to empowerment.

Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute is a how-to book that guides readers step-by-step through one manager's struggle to discover the three essential keys to empowerment. By following the manager's odyssey to the Land of Empowerment, readers discover that they can take the same journey, which, like any heroic journey, is filled with paradox, challenge, and fitful stops and starts. *Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute* provides practical and simple concepts that CEOs, COOs, and managers at all levels in organizations both public and private can apply to their particular situations.

Though many managers have dismissed empowerment as another passing gimmick, we find that people in organizations are naturally attracted to the idea of enhanced involvement at all levels.

Also, we personally have seen organizations succeed with empowerment. Since the mid 1980s, we have worked extensively with a wide variety of companies that were trying to create empowered workplaces. These companies have taught us a great deal about what empowerment is and how to create it. They haven't always known the answers to the questions raised by empowerment, and neither have we. Quite the contrary, it has been through missteps that we have learned the three keys to empowerment presented in this book.

Empowerment is definitely achievable, but the journey is not for the weak in spirit. For those of you who undertake it, we urge you to stay the course. We know that your path can be made easier if you start with and stick to the three keys of empowerment explained in *Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute.*

Good luck on your journey.

Ken Blanchard   *John Carlos*   *Alan Randolph*

Fall 1995

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T he rain beat down steadily. Occasionally the wind threw great splashes against the executive office windows. The sound brought a smile to Marvin Pitts' face. It made him reflect on the beating he felt he was taking lately as president and CEO of a midsize, once-successful company.

Marvin had taken over leadership a little over a year ago, and he had instinctively done his usual thing—seize the checkbook and centralize all decision making. He had developed quite a reputation as a "turnaround" manager and in the process had decided that lack of leadership at the top was usually the cause of a company's problems. As a hands-on manager, it didn't take him long to address that void. Nonetheless, he was beginning to notice that his old ways didn't seem to be working.

Another sheet of rain blasted the office windows, rousing Marvin from his trance. He looked up at the sign on his desk given to him by the consultant his board had recommended for hire.

The sign was really starting to bother him, but he didn't have the nerve to take it down. It read:

**The kind
of thinking
that led
to past success
will not lead
to future success.**
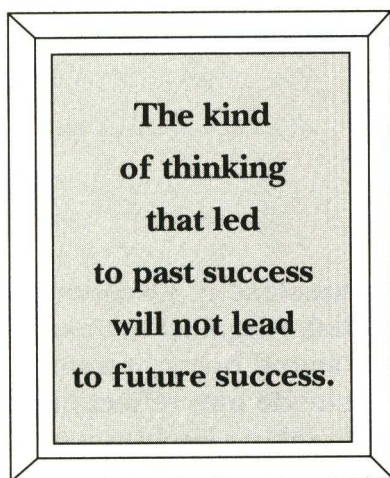
He recalled the consultant putting the sign there after giving Marvin and his management team the results of a study conducted on their industry, their competition, and the company itself. It was there to remind Marvin and others of a painfully obvious fact that the study had confirmed—*management's thinking is the first thing that has to change.*

The board had insisted that Marvin use this consultant, because they felt the "world of business lately" was changing so rapidly that he could no longer figure everything out alone. They felt he needed help. Marvin didn't agree, yet he had to admit that the consultant's study did bring up some interesting points.

In no uncertain terms, the study warned that the company would be outstripped by its competition unless all thinking, structure, processes, and action conformed to four critical organizational attributes. The company needed to be:

1. Customer-driven

2. Cost-effective

3. Fast and flexible

4. Continually improving

Now, as he had so many times before, Marvin mentally reviewed each item on that list.

1. Customer-driven

No one needed to convince Marvin that in today's market, success begins with customers. Still, he missed the old "buyer beware" days when mass-produced products were sure to be consumed, competition was moderate and primarily local, and customers had few choices. Yet, change had come with blinding speed. With the sophistication of today's customers and the variety of products available, the study insisted that any organization not responsive to customers' wants and needs was doomed to be second rate or soon out of business!

2. Cost-effective

The importance of this attribute didn't surprise Marvin, either. Cost increases, together with fierce pricing battles with competitors, had forced companies to shave margins to a fraction of what they had been. Now was clearly a time in which companies were forced to do far more with far less in order to survive.

3. Fast and flexible

The third attribute always brought a moan from Marvin. It pointed in precisely the opposite direction from what he had been accustomed to and comfortable with in the past. He had liked the old paradigm where decision making drifted up the hierarchy. It gave him a chance to get his arms around problems.

However, the study pointed out that changing customer needs had made the cumbersome layers of bureaucratic management as deadly as high cholesterol levels. In the time it took business decisions to move up the hierarchy and back down again, the customer would be long gone. These days, buyers no longer cared who Marvin Pitts was—nor about anyone else at the top of the organization. It was the frontline people they dealt with who made the difference. Marvin bemoaned how sad that was, yet he knew it was true.

Customers wanted their contacts in the company—
frontline employees—to make decisions, solve
problems, and take action right on the spot. Clearly,
quicker was better, and Marvin was reluctantly
beginning to accept that point.

4. Continually improving

Everywhere Marvin turned, he heard that lifelong
learning had to become a norm in his company.
Everyone in the company would have to embrace
the vision of a corporation that would be better
today than it was yesterday and better tomorrow than
today. Marvin knew that would be a difficult task—
creating an organization that would steadily and
consistently outdo itself.

Remembering all this, Marvin took a deep breath
and then slowly and dramatically released it.
Consultants, consultants, consultants, he thought.
It's easy for them to make recommendations. But
who has to do the work of implementing their ideas?
Me!

Once he calmed down, Marvin realized the
consultant's recommendations were right. He knew
that if the company were to survive, he would have
to create an organization that was *customer-driven,
cost-effective, fast and flexible,* and *continually improving.*
But how?

The advice kept coming back from everyone: *We've
got to become leaner and meaner, with fewer management
layers.*

5

We have to release all the untapped creative energy in the company. People must be invited to take responsibility and make full use of their skills and abilities. Everyone needs to feel *empowered* to carry out the charge of making the company more responsive to customers and at the same time financially sound.

Empowerment, thought Marvin. He had begun to hate that word. That's all people talk about today, particularly consultants, and now my board has the disease, he moaned to himself. It used to be that people were happy just to have a job. Now they want more than a job, they want a fulfilling job—one that makes them feel like they are making a real contribution.

Under pressure, Marvin had already made one significant reduction in the work force and eliminated two layers of management. If they want a lean and mean company, he had reasoned, I'll give it to them!

That was nine months ago, Marvin mused, yet nothing seems any different. As he looked out at the driving rain he wondered, where is the spirit of responsibility at work? Where is all that desire to make a contribution?

The sad truth was that throughout the organization people were acting no differently than they had when the company was a multilayered bureaucracy. No one in this new "leaner and meaner" company seemed willing to step up to the plate and take on the challenge. A pall of reluctance hung over the workplace.

As Marvin took the pulse of the company—meeting with employee groups, visiting the shop floor, asking questions of the front line—he had yet to see people *acting* empowered. In fact, they went about their business in the same manner as when the company was dominated by its deadly bureaucratic mind-set. With all the talk about the need for empowerment, Marvin thought the shift would happen spontaneously once the place had been downsized. Obviously, that was not the case.

Everywhere Marvin looked, employees' faces were masks of denial. He sensed that to them, the word *empowerment* was just that, a word—the *E* word. It was driving him crazy!

He often thought of the old maxim, "The more things change, the more they stay the same," and it made him cringe. I knew it, he would say to himself, empowerment is just another buzzword.