

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES WITH DR. GRAC

To effectively empower people, you have to get out from under their feet and give them proper authority to do their best—but you still have to be around to support and encourage them. Create a true win-win agreement upfront so you both know where you stand. You can get help from good old **Dr. GRAC** to do this. Nope, this isn't a person, it's a method recommended by personal development mastermind Stephen Covey to make your discussions explicit and give clear guidance to your team. The acronym describes five elements that will help you cover all bases when working out how to best give others responsibility:

- **DR—Desired Results:** Working together, clarify the responsibility of the job or task as well as the outcomes that are expected. Be explicit about the quantity and quality, and the timings (short, medium or long term) or schedules. Think about the overlap between organisational goals/strategy and personal needs/strengths. Get your colleague's commitment to the agreed-upon results while making it clear you trust them to find the best route there. Shake on it to confirm you're both happy with the task and its scope.
- **G—Guidelines:** Rather than establishing fixed rules of what can and can't be done, decide on the boundaries your team members can operate in. For instance, you might allow your sales people a maximum level of discount that they can negotiate up to, say 20%. Don't go crazy on principles, policies and procedures as they'll just freeze people from acting. You want to allow as much freedom and flexibility as possible so your colleagues can use their own initiative and good judgement to do what's needed. Saying that, it's worth identifying any major no-no's or failure paths that you know from experience are against organisational goals or values. While you're at it, figure out what level of initiative or clearance a person will have regarding different responsibilities. Levels could range from 'wait to be told' or 'make a recommendation' to 'just do it'. Show confidence in people by giving them some license to do the task their way, and be prepared to relax these guidelines as their competence and self-assuredness grows.
- **R—Resources:** Agree on what resources are available to the employee to help him or her get the job done well, for example, budget, research materials, people and tools/equipment. What kind of systems are needed for communication or training? Above all, share information. Give them what they need to know about the situation from a macro and micro perspective so they can make wise decisions. In this sense, you're probably the best resource they could have; not only in the support you can give but also in the experience you can share.

- **A—Accountability:** Holding people accountable for results creates a deep sense of responsibility and ownership. How should the employee keep you posted? How often will you receive progress updates? How will you inspect, measure and evaluate the work? The complexity of the task and the skill levels/experience of the employee will drive the frequency and nature of progress check-ins. Reinforce their accountability and quell any worries by telling them how confident you are in their ability to do the job.
- **C—Consequences:** Agree on what the employee can expect to happen if the project/task is a success and what will happen if it doesn't. Positive consequences might include all kinds of rewards such as public recognition, growth opportunities, advancement, new assignments, training, a more flexible schedule, enlarging their scope of responsibilities, upgrading their tools, improving their work environment or even a promotion. You'll enjoy bestowing these I'll bet. But what about negative consequences? Be very careful about how you handle the times when a not-so-good decision has been made. If you come down too hard on people after a mistake then you can wave goodbye to an empowered team. Perhaps instead of reprimanding them after a failure, you should be commending their efforts instead. Naturally, there will be times when you will need to apply some 'heat'. In these cases, highlight the error and explain your disappointment and what you would have expected (in private, not in public). For the most part, you should encourage the person to take responsibility for their decisions by giving them a chance to self-correct and learn from their mistakes.

After going through this process, you'll feel much more confident leaving the job in the employee's hands and they'll feel better taking it on. Once you've delegated authority, don't leave people to sink or swim. Check in with them regularly and, if they need it, maybe even 'hold their hand' for a short while with some coaching and encouragement. Learning is a process after all, and they'll soon get the hang of being responsible and accountable. I suggest that you keep an up-to-date log of which tasks you've delegated and who you've empowered, and jot down notes of errors made and lessons learned for future reference. Treat your team members as partners and give them increasing power as their strengths improve. The more you empower in this way, the more you advance your team—and the more time, energy and thinking space you have to be proactive. By empowering others you empower yourself to lead your organisation upwards and onwards.