



Empowerment and Morale

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Most of the time morale and empowerment are linked, but they do not always have to be. When we think of empowered people, we imagine individuals who are allowed to figure out how to do their work the best way they know how. When we think of people with high morale, we envision individuals who feel really good about what they are doing for some reason.

I can imagine a situation where my morale would be high but I am not empowered very much. Suppose I am stuffing envelopes at the United Way Office. I have very little freedom to put creativity into the job. It needs to be done just exactly the prescribed way each time. I have very low empowerment and a huge stack of routine work, yet I have a feeling that I am making a contribution to a good cause, so my morale is very high. As a result of my work, many families will be receiving the services they need. My heart is light as I am doing banal work that is incredibly tedious.

On the flip side, imagine I am given an assignment to run the weekly parts inventory as a substitute for the regular technician. I am given the freedom to organize the job and get it done any way I wish. I can come in during evening hours or on the weekend when things are quiet if I like. I am not bound to do the job a specific way as long as I get the job done in a responsible way. My empowerment is pretty high. Unfortunately, I am not a numbers person, and I hate doing inventory. I think it is boring, and it feels like a prison sentence until the job is done. As I launch into the work, my morale is very low. I do not want to do it, yet I am empowered to make all kinds of decisions about how it will be done. In this case, we see high empowerment coupled with low morale.

Most of the time morale and empowerment occur at the same time, but it is a mistake to think this is always the case. The two concepts are different and are impacted differently based on what is going on in a particular case.

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