

COACHING TIP

From Rex C. Houze

THE PROPER USE OF AUTHORITY AND POWER

A common misconception is that authority is bestowed. To the contrary, authority must be earned. Titles are bestowed and it is usually assumed that control and power come with the title. As a result, most managers overestimate the amount of control or power they have and tend to underestimate how much they can influence outcomes.

Authority is the right to decide no and the right to say yes. If someone has the right to decide either yes or no, but not both, they do not have authority. They have the illusion of authority. Empowering someone in an organization to decide no, but not yes, can limit performance and productivity. Authority (the ability to say yes or no) can and must be delegated. In addition, the limits of authority must be clearly defined. Freedom is greatest when boundaries are clearly defined. When people know exactly what their authority entails, they will be more confident to make correct decisions.

Power is the capacity to grant and withhold cooperation. You are a manager because there is a job to get done that you cannot do alone. If you cannot do it alone, you will need the cooperation of others. Therefore, anyone whose cooperation is needed has power. If a manager had both authority and power, everyone would cooperate automatically to get the job done.

A management problem arises when those with power (employees) refuse to cooperate. This lack of cooperation can be manifested in not getting work done at all or correctly, through slowness and delays, and poor quality. Attempts to gain cooperation with authority usually result in bribery or intimidation. If either of these methods worked consistently, most managers would not be needed.

The best way to deal with power (cooperation) is influence. Influence is the ability to get people to cooperate because it is in their best interest to do so. In order to influence people, you need to know what motivates them. To know what motivates them, you need to get to know them as a person because it's hard to motivate a stranger.

To get to know the people on your team, observe them, talk with them, listen to them and find out:

- What they are interested in
- What's important to them
- What they are proud of/what gives them a sense of pride
- What they do for pleasure
- What benefits they want to gain
- What pain they want to avoid
- What motivates them (it's ok to ask them)
- What type of feedback or recognition they prefer

Taking the time to get to know your team members will pay big dividends through better cooperation, improved motivation and morale, and improved performance and results.