

Ownership

By Brian Ladden

For empowerment to take place workers must “own” their job. Managers need to give people accountability and authority to do their job in such a way that they feel ownership, i.e. “I am the MD of my job. Are you?”. Ownership means taking full responsibility (not just accountability) for their job. Responsibility assumes ownership and brings the task and the individual together. The task becomes part of the individual and elicits emotional responses; pride for a job well done or disappointment for not achieving a goal. It is this emotional bond that differentiates responsibility from accountability. Employees who are assigned tasks and expected outcomes by their managers are given accountability and will usually perform up to the level of expectation but will not exceed it.

People are unlikely to take ownership if they are vilified for mistakes that occur or are not rewarded for exceeding expected outcomes. Ownership requires allowing for mistakes, rewarding risk taking, avoiding blame.

Another key to employees taking ownership of their jobs is the sharing of relevant information to the worker. Employees need to be informed about everything that affects their job. When managers are willing to share information about the organisation, both good and bad, they gain trust of their employees. People without information cannot be expected to make good business decisions. Expecting employees to take ownership of their jobs, use their initiative and make important decisions is unrealistic unless they have the same information the manager has. On the other hand, with information people are almost compelled to act with responsibility.