

The Empowered Manager

By Peter Block

The Book in a Nutshell

This book shines a light in the dark of traditional patriarchal, autocratic organizational management. It aims to empower middle managers and employees of traditional business. This path to empowerment is to shed the traditional negative political culture and create a positive political culture by moving away from a bureaucratic cycle of management to an entrepreneurial cycle. This creates improved relationships between all the people within the organization and empowers everyone to take responsibility for the organization as if it were their own. This makes work a better place for all employees, improves relationships with clients and makes the organization more successful.

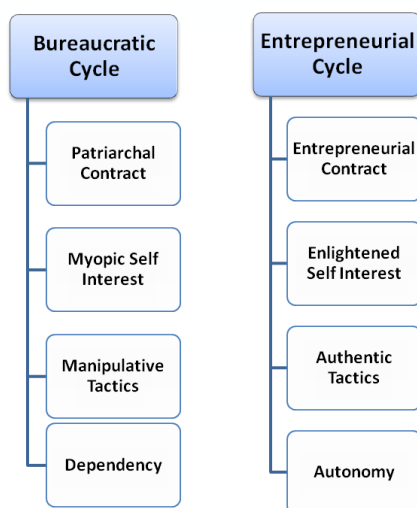
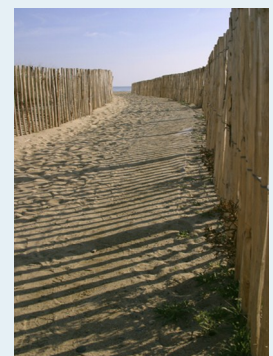


Table of Contents

The Book in a Nutshell.....	1
Chapter 1.....	2
Chapter 2.....	2-3
Chapter 3.....	3-5
Chapter 4.....	6
Chapter 5.....	7
Chapter 6.....	8
Chapter 7.....	8-9
Chapter 8.....	9
My Evaluation.....	10
About the Author.....	10

The Road to Empowerment



Part One: Politics in the Workplace: Rekindling the Entrepreneurial Spirit

Chapter 1: Personal Choices that Shape the Work Environment

Traditional business organizations are controlled by negative political games where too many individuals believe they must:

- Control situations and people.
- Control the release of details and future planning.
- Name drop when they want support.
- Control relationships in a calculated way.
- Give too much time and attention to what their superiors want.
- Withhold honesty to aid in getting ahead.

Block introduces this book by saying that people in business, particularly middle managers, must act like entrepreneurs and engage in positive politics (service, contribution and creation) to change the political game to a positive one.

According to Block, choosing this entrepreneurial path is based on three choices:

1. Maintenance vs. **Greatness**
2. Caution vs. **Courage**
3. Dependency vs. **Autonomy**

“Better to proceed than to wait for direction. Better to ask forgiveness than ask permission. Better to be seen as stubborn than incompetent” Block, P. 1(987). *The Empowered Manager: Political Skills at Work*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, p. 17).

Chapter 2: Origins of the Bureaucratic Mentality

“Organizations unintentionally encourage people to choose to maintain what they have, to be cautious and dependent” (p. 21).

Entrepreneurial = positive politics

Bureaucratic = negative politics

Four Parts of the Bureaucratic Cycle (as illustrated on pages 1 & 3):

- **Patriarchal Contract:** Traditional style of organization where power moves from the top down.
- **Myopic Self Interest:** Personal payoffs and doing what is needed to move up the ladder of success.
- **Manipulative Tactics:** Covertly controlling others.
- **Dependency:** Feeling that success or survival is controlled by others.

Elements that guide our behaviour in the Bureaucratic Cycle:

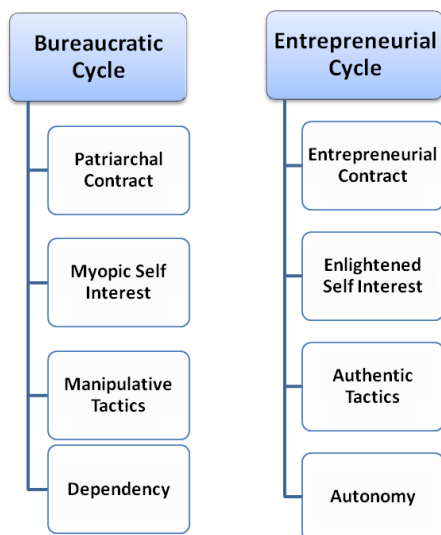
- ⇒ Submission to authority.
- ⇒ Denial of self expression.
- ⇒ Sacrifice for unnamed future rewards.
- ⇒ Belief that the above three are just.



Four Parts of the Entrepreneurial Cycle (as illustrated below):

“Autonomy and compassion in service of a vision...acting to best serve our customers, inside the company and out, letting our actions be an antidote to the cautious, dependent, bureaucratic behavior we are too familiar with...act as if the whole organization we are a part of is in fact our own” (p. 23).

- **Entrepreneurial Contract:** Individuals must trust their instincts and take personal responsibility as if the organization belonged to them.
- **Enlightened Self Interest:** Rewards are the result of interesting jobs where customers are served well and employees are life long learners.
- **Authentic Tactics:** Honest and open communication with all stakeholders; no power hoarding or manipulative games.
- **Autonomy:** Employees are focused on their responsibilities, not their supervisors; this reduces fear and makes available time and energy to focus on the organization.



Chapter 3: Developing Antidotes for Bureaucracy

“The entrepreneurial cycle is the antidote to the bureaucratic cycle” (p. 68).

To create the entrepreneurial cycle, empowerment must be achieved. **Empowerment comes from:**

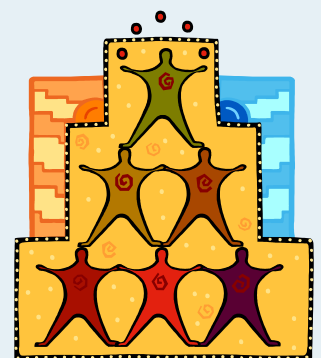
1. The structure, practices and policies that managers follow and implement.
2. The personal choices made by individuals which are reflected in their actions.

Employees feel empowered when:

- ◆ Their survival and success is in their control.
- ◆ They feel a sense of purpose at work (it is not just about the paycheque).
- ◆ They are committed to the organization.



“Empowerment is a state of mind as well as a result of position, policies, and practices. As managers we become more powerful as we nurture the power of those below us” (p. 68).



How to Create an Entrepreneurial Cycle in an Organization:

- A. Create an Entrepreneurial Contract**
- B. Enlightened Self-Interest**
- C. Authentic Tactics**
- D. Autonomy**

A. Create an Entrepreneurial Contract

1. Be your own authority

- Take responsibility for personal actions and knowing how to best serve the business.
- Be a supportive manager:
 - * Invert the organizational hierarchy so those at the lowest level are at the top (or flatten it out so everyone is more equal).
 - * Supervise in a more consultative style and stepping in only when requested.
 - * Have employees do their own appraisals and appraise their supervisor, then discuss.
 - * Create self managing teams with supervisor support.
 - * Empower all staff to take responsibility for calling, organizing and/or running staff meetings.
 - * See job assignments as a two way contract; let employees know what you want from them and ask them what they want from you.

2. Encourage self-expression

- Allow employees to demonstrate creativity, passion and energy in their work.
- Ask employees what they want and how they are feeling; getting employees used to honestly answering these questions will take time and patience.

3. Make commitments

- Do not ask employees to make sacrifices but commitments and express their wants.
 - * Stay focused on the needs and wants of the business and the employees.
 - * Act in ways that give others ownership.
 - * Discourage and confront passive, non-assertive behaviour.
 - * Create a vision of greatness and ask employees to do the same.

4. Believe that #1-3 are just

“Believe that the real authority comes from within and that self expression and commitment are good for the business” (p. 84).

“While the captain may choose the direction, the engine room drives the ship” (p. 72).



B. Enlightened Self Interest

- Put personal goals and individual success secondary to the best interest of the organization
 - * Engage in activities that are meaningful
 - * Contribute to things that are valuable to the organization and focus on service
 - * Have integrity; be honest and realistic
 - * Make a positive impact on others
 - * Master your task.

“The powerful thing about enlightened self-interest is that it is a definition of self-interest that is under our control. To pursue mastery, meaning, contribution, integrity, service is to take a path that does not require the approval or applause of our supervisor. It is the only way to discover and claim our own autonomy, even in the midst of a dependency-creating organization...contribution, service, meaning, integrity, and touching other people in a positive way are all things I can do on my own...” (p. 93).

C. Authentic Tactics

- Acts that are politically positive
 - * Say no when we mean no
 - * Share as much information as possible
 - * Use language that describes reality
 - * Avoid repositioning for the sake of acceptance

“Authentic tactics are an antidote to the manipulative tactics” (p. 95).



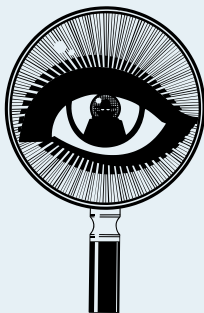
“If our intention is to work in an organization in which authority resides within the person, contribution is self-interest, and authenticity is the norm, then all we have to do is make sure our own actions are aligned with our own intentions” (p. 103).



“Leadership is the process of translating intentions into reality” (p. 103).

Vision

“Vision is the preferred future, a desirable stage, an ideal state” (p. 109).



Crucial:

Create a vision

Commit to vision

Communicate vision

Coach others to find their vision

Chapter 4: Creating a Vision of Greatness: The First Steps Toward Empowerment

How To Empower Ourselves



Create a vision of greatness for our unit.



Identify and manage our allies, adversaries, and fence sitters.



Understand and let go of our own wish for dependency.



Discover the courage required to live out our vision.

Creating a Vision

- Forces us to identify where we want to go and gives us a goal worth risking for.
 - * Forget about being #1. Focus on good work, not external judging.
 - * Don't be practical, dream big.
 - * Begin with your customers. They ensure the survival of the organization.
 - * Don't treat your customers better than you treat each other. Be consistent in expressing beliefs and values.
 - * If your vision statement sounds like motherhood and apple pie and is somewhat embarrassing, you are on the right track.



Chapter 5: Building Support for Your Vision: Negotiating with Allies and Adversaries

To build support from those around us, live the entrepreneurial cycle:

1. Support the authority that comes from within.
2. Express ourselves.
3. Commit ourselves to acting how we want the whole organization to operate.

To identify how those around us in the organization connect to us:

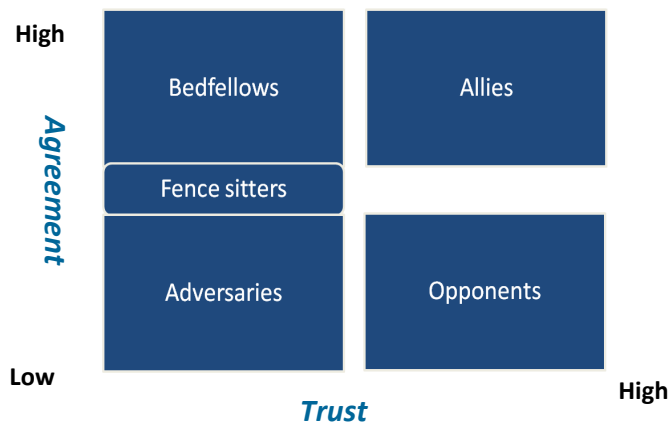
Allies: high agreement / high trust

Opponents: low agreement / high trust

Bedfellows: high agreement / low trust

Fence Sitters: unknown agreement / low trust

Adversaries: low agreement / low trust



ALL play an important role; we just need to identify who is in which role so we understand the relationship and how will affect their support of our vision.

5 Types of relationships @ work:

Allies



Opponents



Bedfellows



Fence sitters



Adversaries



“The trick is to figure out where our stakeholders stand and then to influence them in a way that aligns with our vision and self interest” (p. 139).

Chapter 6: Balancing Autonomy and Dependence: Peace with those around you

“ We use our behavior as a hidden bargain with people who have power over us. This...is our dependency made visible” (p. 167)

We are conditioned to be dependent; it is difficult to change.

“ We give too much power to the people around and above us. Our fear that power will be used against us in a destructive way leads us to be indirect and manipulative...Each of us has developed over the years a patterned way of dealing with powerful people. This is our political script” (p. 164).

There are eight political scripts that are a problem when we use our behaviour as barter— “I’ll do this if you do that.”

Rescue	Rebel
Look good	Be aggressive
Be pleasing	Be formal
Withdraw	Be super rational

We need to choose the scripts we use, take responsibility for our acts, and be confident in our autonomy to follow the entrepreneurial cycle.

“Positive politics requires direct communication of wants, feelings, hopes, disappointments and doubts” (p. 168).

Chapter 7: Facing Organizational Realities: Continual Acts of Courage

Positive politics and engaging in the entrepreneurial cycle requires courage.

“ If we have found a way of doing our job that does not entail any risk, then the organization probably does not need us” (p. 191).



Three Acts of Courage:

- 1. Facing the Harsh Reality** (see things as they really are):
 - ◆ Stop wasting energy on things that are not worth our time.
 - ◆ Feel less crazy.
 - ◆ Show strength.
 - ◆ Improves our odds of getting support for our ideas.
- 2. Our own Contribution to the Problem:**
 - ◆ Take personal responsibility.
 - ◆ Live the vision.
- 3. Give Authentic Statements in the Face of Disapproval:**
 - ◆ Be honest with what is happening and what is observed.
 - ◆ Put the organization ahead of self interest.

“The only time I have seen acts of courage backfire is when they were done with anger” (p. 200).

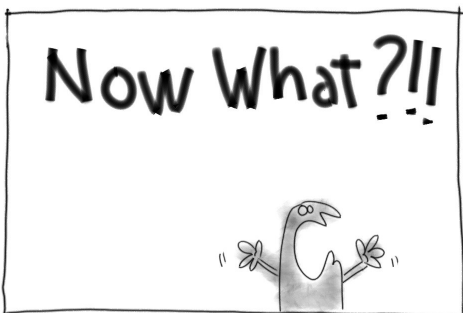
Chapter 8: Enacting the Vision: The Essence of Empowerment

Change takes commitment, time, and the action of living it every day.

Empowerment means no commandments from on high; power from within is key.

Leaders must move toward tension, do not ignore it. This opens dialogue and is where learning takes place.

“Moving toward tension is the belief that the fire of the marketplace tempers and strengthens our ability to survive” (p. 204).



Source: www.customerthink.com

Questions for your consideration:

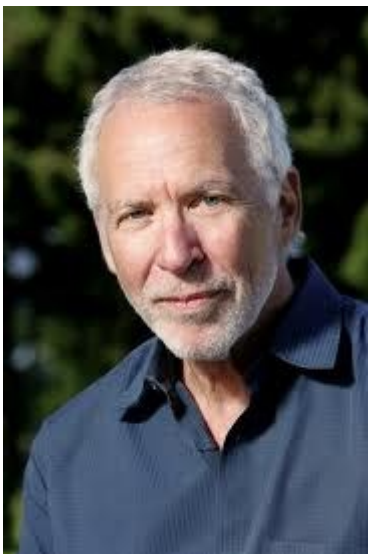
- ◇ Do you work in a positive political climate?
- ◇ If not, what can you do to make changes and empower yourself in your current work situation?
- ◇ If yes, how well is the entrepreneurial cycle functioning in your work situation?

My Evaluation

I found this book to be an interesting , easy read. The author did a nice job of defining and illustrating the common negative political climate that exists in organizations and then introduced the idea of creating a positive political climate to empower employees and create a positive work environment. The steps to creating a positive entrepreneurial cycle were well laid out. The book was an well written theoretical piece, with some examples of how it would apply in the actual business world.

It was difficult at times to relate this to education as it was completely business centred. And I would have appreciated an update on the effectiveness of Block's approach since this book was originally written in 1987 and the business world has undoubtedly changed since that time. I'm curious if overall the business world has shifted to more empowerment of its employees by creating positive political climates . And I would like to know if the entrepreneurial cycle is more of a norm in the business world now than it was in 1987. Finally, it would be interesting to see Block's ideas translated into the world of education. Empowerment in education is important in the era of distributed leadership and effective professional learning communities, therefore the ideas in this book could provide important information about how to improve empowerment in school organizations where it is lacking.

“Each time we act as a living example of how we want the whole organization to operate, it is a positive political act” (p. 7).



Source: <http://craigslfoundation.org/>

About the Author

Peter Block is a well respected expert in organizational development. He is the author or co-author of several books including *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used* (1st edition 1980, 3rd edition 2011), *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (2010), *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2008), *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest* (1993) and *The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work* (1987).

His work focuses on the importance of people and their relationships within organizations. He sees these connections between people and the empowerment of everyone in organizations as the key to changing the negative politics of business as usual.

His company, *Designed Learning*, works with businesses to help to initiate positive, empowering changes.

Source: http://www.peterblock.com/about_peter/