Unpacking Empowerment, Leadership and Collaboration

EMPOWERMENT….discovering and living what is personally meaningful

LEADERSHIP….commitment in action

COLLABORATION…working together to achieve results

Although these three words are often used in the workplace and beyond, what do these concepts actually mean and how are they inter-related? For leaders to be effective, their capacity needs to include a degree of empowerment and collaboration skill. Both are pre-requisites for real achievement as each involves healthy relationship-building – with self and others.

Some leaders speak about their ability ‘to empower others’. In this sense, empowerment is confused with the act of giving authority. Rather, consider that empowerment is an inside-out process that involves accessing one’s authentic power. So by definition it is a self-generated. Authentic power is different from role or title power as it entails discovering one’s truth and acting in alignment with that truth. Truth is in reference to supporting one’s needs and values. Empowerment is therefore a journey in deepening self-awareness to live with integrity.

Respected leaders from history such as Gandhi and Mandela reflect this authentic power as both influenced others because they lived their values. Their power did not arise from being lawyers but from becoming clear on their values, which informed their commitments. They led and inspired others from their inner center. Both leaders had unwavering commitment to their vision, risking punishment and harm. As such, empowerment implies courage to speak one’s truth. Ultimately, it is about shifting out of victimhood to self-responsibility. This means seeing oneself at the source of life versus at the affect of circumstances.

In terms of collaboration, leaders are well-served in developing this art and skill if they wish to sustain their relationships. Collaboration is about holding all needs with care, which strengths connection. The concept of collaboration is often used inter-changeably with compromise. Yet collaboration is different in generating a win-win outcome whereas compromise involves both parties giving up all or part of what one wants. With collaboration, strategies are created after considering and supporting all needs.

When leaders facilitate collaborative dialogue with stakeholders, mutually agreeable solutions are found. This way of solving problems and making decisions increases the likelihood of follow-through on promises. Moreover, collaboration involves power-sharing and equal partnership, ingredients to healthy relationships. Empowerment and collaboration are important keys to leadership success.

As a leader, how would you describe your sense of empowerment and your ability to collaborate?