



# Leadership Development

*Anywhere, Anytime*

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #38

August 10, 2020

## *The Law of Empowerment*

*John Maxwell*

As you prepare for teachers and students to come back to school over the next few weeks, I know you must have a “to do list” longer than a child’s first letter to Santa. Many of you are familiar with the work of John Maxwell in the field of leadership. Over the years I have been inspired, centered and at times refocused by reviewing *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 2007. The Law of Empowerment may help you accomplish your “to do list” by intentionally empowering the people in your building to serve in new ways.

Dr. Maxwell describes empowerment by reminding us of Henry Ford. The reign of Henry Ford is one I grew up on. Historically, the automobile industry provides the tapestry of Michigan just like Motown, Magic Johnson and Gordy Howe. Henry Ford was a successful industrialist producing automobiles using an assembly line though he had leadership deficits. The most notable was his inability to empower the team to be creative or help make decisions. As the story goes, Mr. Ford was so in love with the Model T that when a group of his designers presented him with a prototype of a new, improved model he was enraged. The Ford Motor Company produced only the Model T for twenty years. In 1927 when they manufactured the Model A the company was well behind others in technical innovation. Needless to say, the market share decreased as other companies had surpassed the work of Ford.

Ford was the opposite of an empowering leader. He undermined, micromanaged and looked over the shoulders of his top people. Engineers, fabricators, designers left The Ford Motor Company because they were not empowered or trusted to contrive ideas that might improve the company. When Henry Ford II took over the company, he brought a much different leadership style. He believed in the power of the team to not only get the job done but to come up with innovative methods of pushing their product forward. He hired the best team members he could, with the skill set necessary to do the job and trusted them to do their job and more! Henry Ford II believed in the law of empowerment.

*“The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”*  
*Theodore Roosevelt.*

Education is in the middle of a sea of change. We have learned many things from the changes which were made as a response to shuttering schools and implementing distance learning. We identified new challenges and celebrated the willingness of teachers to adopt to a new way of work. Have we learned enough to let go of old processes which may be barriers to instructional leadership and student success? Are we in a position to gather a team of teachers together and empower them to look to the future and recommend new processes we can embrace, or will we slide back to business as usual once students come back to school?

The best leaders are dedicated to followers reaching their full potential. Effective leaders offer guidance, give others power and set the expectation for success by providing resources, authority and responsibility in their role. They create opportunities for candid conversations about what works and what needs modification. They encourage the team to identify processes which can be abandoned or revised to increase the return on investment.

*“Leading well is not about enriching yourself—it’s about empowering others.” J. Maxwell*

School leadership is complex. The most effective leaders learn early in their career that they must empower teachers, staff, and other lead team members to assume responsibility, initiate new methodology, take healthy risks and seek solutions to complex problems.

*When everyone comes back to school, how will you intentionally empower the people you lead to take the reins, innovate, and make decisions to make teaching and learning better for everyone?*