INTELLIGENT AUTONOMY

(Quick Reference Guide – excerpted from Chapter 6 of *Make It Matter* by Scott Mautz)

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How can you craft Intelligent Autonomy, or empowerment done right? It starts with a simple but important insight: It takes work to give away work. This is particularly true if you want to avoid the surprising dark side of empowerment (we can screw it up even though we mean well)! Here's eight ways to grant autonomy in an intelligent fashion.

1) Fulfill the Foundational Requirements
Ensure a baseline of trust, a practice of information sharing, and a willingness to delegate growth work, not just grunt work. Employees have to feel themselves stretching and feel the influence they have to truly feel empowered. If you allow for substantive, not inconsequential decisions to be made by the empowered, and overcome any fear you might have of delegating some big decisions as well, you are on the way to smartly implementing autonomy and avoiding some of the most basic pitfalls en route.

2) Have an Agreement for Autonomy in Place
Whether a document or a discussion, it will formalize the rules of engagement and operation in the handover of power. Such an agreement can be broken out into three parts: construction, consideration, and consultation. *Construction* involves building a basic set of expectations for the work associated with the empowered tasks (objective and goals behind the delegated work, understanding of the work that needs to be done and its scope, decisions that need to be made, and the success measures that will determine if the transferred power was wielded effectively.) *Consideration* means the empowered must also show some specific consideration toward the delegator (you), such as keeping you informed. You will then be able to back up your employee's decisions if necessary, and you can better answer inquiries from your own chain of command. *Consultation* spells out the decisions that will require your specific consultation. You need to be brave in pushing the authority to make decisions down into the organization while still having a mechanism for giving your input if it's truly necessary.

3) Facilitate Recipient Readiness
Just because employees are empowered doesn't mean they are set up to succeed. They may have difficulty accepting the new responsibilities for fear they will be overmatched or because they view the new responsibilities as an added burden to a job that already has enough pressures. As a countermeasure to this unhealthy set of attitudes, you must ensure that your employees are ready to accept the responsibility. Provide training and resources; have a discussion with them about the benefits of the newfound autonomy. You should work to ease the fears of accountability that can come with empowerment, ensuring that people are set up to win and confident that they will. The employees themselves have to demonstrate that they are ready, willing, and able as well.

4) Provide Intrinsic and Extrinsic Reward
More work without more reward is rarely welcome. And even if the work must be done, the motivation might not exist to do it. That is why it is so vital to ensure that there are intrinsic and extrinsic rewards baked into the new work. You can make the work intrinsically motivating by building in flexibility to allow employees to define what they want to get out of the new autonomy granted. Let employees choose their own goals to go with the agreed-on objectives, or even help them brainstorm what's in it for them that could be very personally rewarding. Perhaps they want to use the

newly transferred power to develop their leadership skills and decision-making capabilities. They may be interested in growing their ability to develop other people, increasing the rapport with their cross-functional partners, or just learning something new for the pleasure of learning. Of course, let us not forget the good old-fashioned *extrinsic* reward and recognition that should accompany the added responsibility and accountability sought from the employee. Proper recognition for expanded responsibility that is well handled is a must, as are meaningful rewards.

5) Facilitate by Assisting Success vs. Avoiding Failure
Mistakes will be made when employees are given autonomy. Part of the reason employees need to be empowered in the first place is to learn from the experience of their mistakes. The mistake you have to avoid as a manager is reacting poorly to their mistakes. It's important that you let the cycle of empowerment work itself out where the employee learns from both successes and failures. You have to act as a facilitator, not a fixer, and allow delegated decisions to stick (and even help them to stick with higher authorities and broader reaching groups). It's equally important that you wholeheartedly demonstrate the belief that the empowered can handle the added responsibilities without incessant oversight. The minute you start acting like you want people to avoid any miscues, the empowerment itself has failed. Instead, shift to a mindset of assisting success. Help your empowered employees move quickly past mistakes as needed, and then turn your energy back to finding ways to help them succeed.

6) Construct Communication Loops
Breakdowns in communication can mean a breakdown in trust between you and the employee you've delegated decision-making authority to. Autonomous employees shouldn't go off the grid, but instead should find ways to report back regularly on progress. Checkpoints should be established (as part of the *consideration* portion of the agreement for autonomy) to provide updates, encouragement, help, training in teachable moments, and to avoid operational drift whereby work migrates away from previously aligned objectives and parameters. And while those working autonomously can't forget to check in, you can't just delegate and check out, either. Communication needs to be a two-way street. It can put your mind at ease as well as help the confidence of the autonomously operating individuals as they feel better connected.

7) Covet Communication Loops
Communicate with your empowered employees in a manner such that they actually come to *covet* the communication loops in place over time, viewing them as helpful and rewarding. If you begin to sense that the fierce sense of independence developed (typical of empowered individuals) is beginning to backfire, it's time to revisit how the communication loops are being used. Focusing those communication touch points on open, honest, helpful, and rewarding exchanges can leave the empowered feeling that it is productive and powerful to continue inviting management in along the way as appropriate.

8) Tie a Measurement Tether
Having established success criteria and measures in the agreement for autonomy and reviewing progress against those measures periodically (as part of the communication loop) will help ensure work stays on course. It also helps keep the empowered motivated along the way as they have tangible evidence they are on track to hitting their goal. As important, keeping the measures front and center

reinforces what success looks like, otherwise it can easily fall prey to a variety of interpretations. Doing so ensures everyone defines success the same way and helps ensure that the ultimate output of the autonomy can be celebrated by all--which is meaningful in its own right.