

Growing Champions in the Workplace

by John Smithman

To give you the time to be an effective leader, and to enjoy your role, surround yourself with people you can trust; people in whom you have the confidence that they will do good work – even when you are not available to help them. The benefit to you is that you will have more time to do the things you should be doing to grow the company.

Your people will get their focus and general direction from you. Then, they will develop their plans, justify the resources they will need, and get the results you want. In short, you will build 'champions' around you.

Here's how...

1. **Ask For Choices:** When someone calls on you for help with a problem—a challenge, don't let them leave the problem with you! The Champion-Building method is to ask them to offer you two good solutions to their problem for your consideration. Train them not to bring you a problem without bringing you at least two recommendations for solving the problem. You can tell them where to search for answers, but don't give them the answers.
2. **Let Them Choose:** When they return with at least two solutions, ask them to tell you which solution they prefer. Then ask them why they prefer it.
3. **Feedback and Coach:** (This is where the real growth happens.)

Two things can happen: they will make the *right* choice or the *wrong* one.

If they make the *right* choice, be supportive and praise them for good thinking. Thank them and tell them to carry on.

If they make the *wrong* choice, gently help them probe for the *what-can-go-wrong's*. Give them hints if you must. But do try to get them to discover the flaws on their own. Be patient. Be quiet. Let them think it through.

[Note: the reason I put the words *wrong* and *right* in italics is because sometimes our champions will come up with better solutions than we will. By getting them to explain their reasoning, we may find that there are good reasons for their choices that we didn't have time to consider. For complex questions, there are no *right* answers only better ones.]

In summary, the three steps for Building Champions are:

1. Ask the champion for recommendations. Ask for at least two good solutions.
2. Ask the champion which solution they prefer and why they prefer it.
3. Be a coach: give positive, constructive feedback to encourage problem-solving behaviour.

Don't worry about not being needed by the champions that you grow. As they begin to resolve their own problems, they will still look to you for positive feedback and for new challenges to help them grow even greater.

To Your Success,

John Smithman