

## Your Staff Feels Powerless

by Peter Arthur-Smith, Leadership Solutions, Inc.®

*'It's not usually possible to define people by their cover. Many times, beneath the surface, lie extraordinary talents that are waiting to be found or appreciated.'*

Staff feeling powerless is a reality of the Great Recession. People feel anxious for their organization to survive and they yearn for it to emerge at the other end stronger, fitter and positioned to succeed: with them still on board. However, they feel stuck, perplexed and at a loss.

What is the issue? The issue is their executives are still running around in the belief that they have to be the boss. And bosses are still zipping around trying to douse fires and come up with all the answers, while their staff just stands on the sidelines watching and waiting.

Three examples in point: A North Carolina hi-tech company needs to upgrade its manufacturing efforts so that it can handle orders in a more effective way. This would release much needed capital for other important investments. While the shop floor waits, its operations director is running around chasing budgets and putting out purchasing fires.

A Florida hospital manager is running around and looking for State funding, while her people are chomping at the bit waiting to provide their input on contingency efforts to insure survival.

A professional practice is feeling the pinch. Its staff desperately wants to contribute in some shape or form to turn things around, but the practice owner is slow to take the bait; beleaguered by difficult economic times.

What's wrong here? It's the continuance of the pre-recession 'command and control' model. The staff people keep their heads down and perform their day-to-day job: their bosses run around trying to keep things afloat. Let's be clear, within our traditional workplace cultures, our staff feels obliged to stand on the sidelines unless invited contribute.

What has to change? Firstly, the boss has to change and become a leader instead. Leaders are well known for gathering their team around them when required and LISTEN. Together they will paint a picture of "What outcome they would like to see emerge?" and "Where do they see themselves now?" and "What is the optimum way for them to bridge the gap?" (NOTE: It would be particularly useful if they use a technique like *option solving* –see examples on [www.optionsolving.com](http://www.optionsolving.com) – as it would help the team to explore its most viable options and quickly choose the most favorable [potentially out-of-the-box] consensus solution to make that option happen. This can also be done

On-line, too, through a sister technique called OSOLing [*option solving on-line*].)

Secondly, through a team exercise like this, leaders would now have a forum to inspire their staff people to lift their heads and offer respectful counsel and advice when appropriate, rather than sit on the sidelines. They would also be able to refer to the option solving technique, as a way of inviting group input in a valuable and more decision-effective manner.

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Additionally, it would signal to them how they can, as a team or individually, contribute in any reasonable way without incurring undue expense (different from the past, where they waited for money to be thrown at situations). Their depleted pocket-books are a testament to the fact that such behavior cannot continue. In most cases they will, with the right attitude by their leader, find that little money is needed to make significant strides in many areas.

Suddenly the deadlock is broken. Leaders feel empowered to involve their people in a much more valuable way. Our staff feel empowered to make proposals and participate in a more resourceful way. When our staff doesn't feel powerless, everyone wins.

Maybe our 'command-and-control' model is finally about to die: a casualty of the Great Recession!

Give it a try. Start today. There's everything to be gained, by everybody.

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