

LETTING GO

By Marilyn Thiet

As a parent, one of the toughest things I struggled with as my children reached adulthood was "letting go", empowering each of them to make their own decisions and mistakes, and control their own destinies. I felt very little anxiety when I could control their every move, keep them safe, and prevent them from making painful mistakes. As a leader I've experienced the same thing with my team, "letting go" did not come easily. In my first management role many years ago my manager was pretty direct in his feedback to me. I wanted to control too much, I didn't delegate enough and I micromanaged my team to the point they could not make a decision on their own. I created a dependency on me which made me feel important and at the time I thought it made me a great manager. We got the job done, but there was very little innovation or personal growth and most likely a lot of frustration.

Fast forward 15 plus years. This week I had the opportunity to meet face to face with someone who works for me, a rarity given the thousands of miles that separate our offices. It was a great opportunity to catch up on multiple client projects. As I was updated on the current and future status of several projects I realized how little I know of the day to day work that is being done to drive business forward for each client. I am keeping my eye on the big picture, watching incredibly innovative ideas being implemented, keeping in contact enough to know the clients are delighted and my team members are feeling challenged, empowered, and very satisfied with the work they are doing. I've done it, I've "let go" and have empowered my team to think, create, and flourish. And in a candid conversation I was reassured that while this person feels the empowerment and loves the independence, she also feels supported and knows that I am a phone call away if my involvement is needed or my opinion is warranted. I'd like to believe as a parent that my adult children feel the same. Trusting in how I've raised my children, just like trust in knowing I've hired great people, has allowed me to experience a mostly anxiety free "letting go". I don't ask for weekly or monthly activity reports from my team. Instead I look at outcomes and client feedback, trusting that the tactical activities are on target as goals are met and exceeded.

How about you? How successful have you been at "letting go" and empowering your team? Are your conversations activity based or outcome based? Is the environment you've created safe for your team to innovate and try new ideas, even if they fail? If you believe you have let go and empowered the team are you still close enough to provide appropriate support when needed, or have you left the team in a free fall spiraling out of control? Maintaining the appropriate amount of control vs empowerment is a skill that takes time, effort, and discipline to accomplish. But once you conquer it, "letting go" will be the best thing you can do for yourself, your team, and your company.