
Empowering Teams using the Freedom Scale

Selected lateralworks Best Practices

lateralworks have compiled a composite list of successful practices of new product development teams. lateralworks documented these practices in a multi-year ongoing study of successful new product development teams in Silicon Valley. The use of a "Freedom Scale" by teams and their executive managers is critical to defining the boundaries of power and control for both the team and its supporting host organization. The following is an introduction to the Freedom Scale concept.

Freedom Scale: Empowerment Continuum used by Successful Teams

Freedom Level 1	Act, routine reporting only	After the fact control
Freedom Level 2	Act, but advise at once	During the fact control
Freedom Level 3	Recommend and then take resulting action	Before the fact control
Freedom Level 4	Ask what to do	Trainee
Freedom Level 5	Wait until told	Trainee

- Freedom Levels #2 & #3: Provides leverage and growth. Experienced professionals cannot work below these levels of freedom.
- Freedom Levels #4 & #5: Behavior only available for those in training status. Levels of freedom are delegated by the boss and/or earned by the subordinate.

Freedom Level 1...Act, routine reporting only

Boss has after-the-fact control only; maximum level of empowerment/most growth for subordinate; most leverage for boss; this freedom level reserved for those who are "self starters", have demonstrated an ability to consistently produce excellent work, on time within or under budget. Freedom Level #1 may not apply to all elements of subordinates work - depending upon their experience/competence or the relative impact some of the subordinates work may reflect directly on the bosses overall performance.

Freedom Level 2...Act, but advise at once

Boss has during-the-fact control; a "grade" less empowerment/growth for the subordinate; somewhat less leverage for boss yet enables either a "fast-audit" before decisions/actions are implemented - or an early shot at damage control should "wrong" decisions/actions be inadvertently taken prior to the "fast-audit"; this freedom level reserved for those who typically take the initiative (but not always), who do good work,

are typically on time with their commitments and stay within budget. Freedom Level 2 also may not apply to all elements of subordinates work for the same reasons noted above in Freedom Level 1.

Freedom Level 3...Recommend and then take resulting action

Boss has before-the-fact control; substantially less empowerment/growth for subordinate and less leverage for boss, but still enables some degree of empowerment/growth and leverage for both the boss and subordinate. Makes potential decisions/actions relatively "fail safe", but requires more of the bosses time in training/coaching mode.

This freedom level reserved for those who are in an "advanced" training mode or who are veterans but have typically not demonstrated a tendency to take the initiative nor consistently produce excellent/good quality work; who periodically miss key milestones and may exceed budgets from time to time.

Freedom Level 3 also may not apply to all elements of subordinates work for the same reasons noted above in Freedom Level 1. "Trainees" should, in due time, pass through this level on most elements of their work if they are to be considered "keepers" and are worth their salt.

Those veterans who are unable to move up the freedom scale (from Level 3) on most elements of their work should be considered marginal and easily susceptible to being "shot" should better talent become available.

Freedom Level 4...Ask what to do

Little to no empowerment/growth for subordinate and nearly zero leverage for boss. This subordinate behavior is only allowed for the first few weeks following the hire date. Veterans who demonstrate this behavior should be "shot" immediately. Some bosses get sucked into and comfortable with this subordinate behavior because they enjoy the attention/need to be needed and they appear to "care" about and be sensitive to their people and their never-ending needs. They are often threatened by subordinates who demonstrate Levels 1, 2 and even 3 kinds of behavior.

Bosses who are regularly responding to the question, "what do you want me to do now, boss?" should be demoted or "shot". They don't produce any leverage for the organization since they are typically doing subordinates work for them (i.e. working one level down). This is a major hidden cause for lost productivity in the organization.

Most of these bosses enjoy the one-level-down work but also the pay that goes with being the boss. They are typically survivors because they look busy and appear to be in touch with the real work. They typically have poor performers working for them since high potentials can't stand a boss who's constantly in their

shorts and therefore quit; thus they are, in fact, busy since their employees are typically incompetent which requires the boss to continually "fix" their screw ups.

Freedom Level 5...Wait until told.

Virtually no empowerment/growth for employee nor leverage for the boss. This behavior is only available for the first day or two of employment - after which they should be "shot"

Additional Notes

- *If you're a High Potential subordinate: Don't work for bosses who are comfortable responding to a continual rash of questions from subordinates, who are busy as hell "helping" subordinates or who are putting in a lot of hours fixing subordinates screw-ups. Work for the boss who wants you to get to Freedom Level 1 ASAP.*
- *If you are an Incompetent Subordinate: Go to work for the boss described above.*
- *If you are a High Potential Boss: Get rid of the bosses described above and hire those subordinates who want to move to Freedom Level 1 ASAP.*
- *If you are an incompetent Boss: "Cover your ass" by: Telling your boss that the 1, 2 & 3 people working for you are "out of control", unwilling to pay their dues, causing morale problems and making mistakes- before they quit and make you look bad. Keeping the 4 & 5 type people working for you - with an occasional 3 - so you won't get "upstaged" and can do the work you really want to do (one level down) while being the only one who knows what's going on and therefore secure in your job. However, you need to accept working longer hours to fix subordinate "screw ups" while appearing busy and dedicated in the eyes of your bosses. Bitch about the poor quality of workmanship today, lack of dedicated/hard working /loyal employees in today's workforce - while stroking and kissing the asses of the boss(s) above you. Dedicate yourself to creating and continually refining a list of foolproof excuses for any and all screw-ups that could ever occur in your department.*