



RON KELLEHER
Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

The Executive Enabler

Enabling Organizations Increases Productivity

By Ron R. Kelleher

There has been a lot of talk about the manager as coach; how leaders can use a “coaching” style to increase productivity in their organizations. In some circles the manager as coach has been touted as a cure-all for the ills that have stricken our businesses. Most managers realize that while a coaching style isn’t a cure-all it can certainly be helpful in today’s environment.

Pat Riley’s book *The Winner Within* has many examples of “teaching” and “coaching” the Lakers. Coach Riley does a great job of making the connection between the work of a sports coach, and the work of a manager with employees. Riley makes the point often that there is a big difference between teaching a skill, and building performance through coaching.

Let’s begin with an understanding of the difference between managers who teach, and those who coach. A teacher is someone who imparts or passes on knowledge. A coach is someone who passes on a skill. For example, I could sit down with Coach Riley, and he could explain basketball strategy to me. He could tell me how to pass, dribble, shoot, and all the other mechanical elements of playing basketball. That makes him a teacher. He becomes a coach the minute he comes down onto the floor with me and shows me how to hold the ball, watches as I try a few passes, makes some suggestions for how to improve, gives me time to practice, encourages me, etc. Simply put, teaching is telling, coaching is showing.

WHO SHOULD COACH?

In the last few years we have generally thought of the manager or supervisor as the coach, and employees as the ones being coached. But just as Magic Johnson was the Lakers’ *player coach*, so business should use employees as coaches as well. In business, the coach should be the person who has the skill, not necessarily the manager.



BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Some people are excited by the prospect of change. They enjoy learning new things. Their adrenaline surges as they drive themselves to new heights of accomplishment. But many people are less excited by change. They like the status quo. They question their ability to learn new skills. They may even create internal barriers that prevent them from learning effectively. Some of these learning barriers are visible, some are not:

- **Fear of the unknown.** Some employees are truly fearful of what they don't know or understand.
- **Resistance to change.** The infamous "RC" factor; resistance to change! The "RC" factor disables managers and employees alike. People who are comfortable don't like change. People who have been successful with one method resist change.
- **Fear of appearing incompetent.** Many people don't relish the idea of their bosses finding out that they are less than perfect, that they have faults, that they don't understand, or that they haven't quite gotten the hang of something yet.
- **Insecurity.** I know a man who is an excellent salesman. But because the company he works for has been downsizing he is convinced that the sales force is next, and that he could easily find himself unemployed any moment. His insecurity has created a barrier to learning new skills that would keep him ranked at the top of his group.

The Manager As A Barrier

When it comes time to roll out a new program some teacher style managers will bring everyone together into a conference room, lecture at them for a day, and then turn them loose thinking that he or she has done a great job of training. But as the results will soon show, some people learned more from the lecture than others. The manager who fails to adapt their teaching style to people's special needs creates the greatest barrier to learning of all. People are all different and to the extent that they learn differently a manager needs to adapt their style to be most effective for the individual.

COACHING VERSUS ENABLING

An executive is a coach when he or she goes beyond "telling" and actually demonstrates a skill. In basketball a player often has better skill sets than the coach, but the coach can demonstrate how to improve. It is the same in business. A manager may not be the best salesperson, but they can show someone how to improve.

But wouldn't it be great if the manager didn't have the burden of coaching the entire organization? The secret is to become an "enabler." An enabler creates an army of employees who teach and coach each other.



Remember, the person who should do the coaching is the person with the skill. Employees have many diverse skills, only some of which may be used in their current position.

If you create an environment where each individual takes charge of not only their own skill improvement, but also teaches and coaches others then you are an enabler.

NEHEMIAH THE ENABLER

The one thing business does not need is another empty program promising miraculous results. But becoming an executive enabler and creating an enabled organization is truly worth the effort. One great example of the power of enabling is found in the story of Nehemiah rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

Ezra led a remnant of people back to Jerusalem and they began rebuilding the city. But twelve years later they had still not rebuilt the city walls, and the people were under constant threat from marauders. Nehemiah heard about the condition of Jerusalem and left his comfy job working for King Artaxerxes to take over the Jerusalem project. Under his leadership the city walls were rebuilt in only 52 days.

Nehemiah was extremely effective because he was a man of God, an outstanding leader, a good supervisor, and an *enabler*. Here are some of the characteristics of an enabler that Nehemiah exhibited:

Remove Barriers

Nehemiah recognized that change is difficult and that men could find many excuses not to finish the work. So before he ever left for Jerusalem he developed a plan. He thought about the work that needed to be done, and the materials required to complete the work.

Once the basic plan was in place and building materials secured, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and spent three days surveying the city. He personally rode around the entire city to understand firsthand the work to be done. Then and only then did he assemble the city fathers for a heart-to-heart chat. He discussed his vision for Jerusalem; *“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come and let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace”* (Neh. 2:17).

The city fathers were so excited about the plan that they immediately agreed to begin rebuilding the city walls.

Empower the Workers

Nehemiah was faced with an enormous project. He did not have the luxury of having a full-time staff of trained wall builders and gate hangers at his disposal. He didn't have an army that he could commandeer. Nor did he have thousands of slave laborers. Nehemiah had to get the job of



building the city walls, and hanging the city gates done with the ordinary citizens who lived there.

He began by enlisting everyone in the city to become involved in the building project. He had goldsmiths, priests, perfume makers, guards, and merchants among the people working on the walls. Women worked next to men. Community leaders worked alongside servants.

Each person was given a specific job; a section of wall, or a specific gate to work on, and they were left to get the job done on their own.

Encourage Risk Taking

Any truly important result carries with it some element of risk. In rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem the people faced opposition from several neighboring cities who conspired to stop the rebuilding.

When Nehemiah found out about the threats he posted guards but kept the people working; *“From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, ‘Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.’ Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water”* (Neh. 4:16-18, 21-23).

People may be averse to taking risks but risk can be evaluated, controlled, and encouraged.

Leverage Diversity

With only a few workers skilled at building walls and hanging gates Nehemiah had to utilize all the labor resources available to him. Priests worked next to merchants and city leaders. People from other towns worked next to the people of Jerusalem. No one who had a heart for the work was kept from helping because of their background, lack of experience, or their place of birth.

Provide Autonomy

While the wall was being built we never read about Nehemiah micro-managing the project. Neither do we read about an army of supervisors running around checking everyone’s work. People had the assignment of rebuilding the wall in front of their own home, and they did so with great care. Nowhere is there a report that their work had to be redone because it didn’t meet quality standards.



Motivate & Inspire

Every day Nehemiah walked the walls watching the work being done. No doubt he encouraged the people as he went. Eliashib, the high priest, set an example by working with his priests rebuilding the Sheep Gate (Neh. 3:1). Workers who see their leaders standing next to them in their labors rather than seeking the comfort of a shady tree will be motivated to work harder.

Reward & Recognize

Following the establishment of a government, the people rededicated the city and themselves to God. Then, at Nehemiah's command they celebrated; *"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to the Lord"* (Neh. 8:10).

It doesn't take a lot of time or money to provide recognition for a job well done. Employee surveys continue to reflect people's desire for recognition and rewards that are administered fairly and recognize work of exceptional quality.

Encourage Followership

It is interesting that Nehemiah had city leaders working on the wall doing the same work as the merchant. Nowhere in this account do we find these leaders complaining about the work they were asked to complete. Neither do we read about the common man complaining about long hours and poor working conditions. People simply went about doing the work they were assigned.

The ability to follow direction and to be a reliable, trustworthy worker is a skill to be honored not one to be looked down upon as subservient.

Getting Started

Becoming a leader who "enables" their employees will require extra thought and work, but the results are well worth the effort. Here are eight steps you can take to make yourself into an enabling leader:

- **Remove Barriers.** Take steps immediately to remove barriers from your company. Common employee learning barriers include fear of the unknown, resistance to change, fear of appearing incompetent, and insecurity. Besides removing these barriers managers need to learn how to adapt their training styles to fit the employee.
- **Empower Employees.** The greatest gift a manager can give an employee is empowerment. Give employees the responsibility and authority to get work done and then get out of their way!



- **Encourage Risk Taking.** Employees who fear for their jobs if they take risks that fail will quickly learn to limit their risks to those that will succeed. This is not risk-taking at all; it is simply managing the downside. Employees who take risks are the ones that will deliver breakthrough performance. This behavior should be encouraged not stifled.
- **Leverage Diversity.** One of the most overlooked corporate assets is the diversity of our employees. Every single employee brings to the job different experiences, thought processes, and job skills. A company that does not aggressively develop plans to take advantage of this wealth of experience is limiting the effectiveness of their work force.
- **Provide Autonomy.** Employees should be working at the tasks that best meet their job skills. They should be given the authority and responsibility to get their jobs done without undue layers of management checking off on every detail of a proposal.
- **Motivate & Inspire.** Do you want employees who give 120% all of the time? Then find ways to motivate and inspire each employee. People need recognition, job security, stability, personal training and coaching, and a host of other things. Money is usually not the biggest motivator for most employees.
- **Reward & Recognize.** Employees crave recognition for a job well done. It is so easy to take a moment to privately or publicly recognize personal accomplishments that there is no excuse for not doing it. Write a “job well done” comment on a report, or circulate an “atta boy” on your audix system.
- **Encourage Followership.** Everyone in an organization is a follower. The CEO follows the direction of a board and shareholders, and every other employee is a follower for their boss. Employees need to learn how to follow as well as lead and manage. Good followership skills should be recognized and rewarded rather than looked down upon.

One Final Thought

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. He prayed for the people in Jerusalem (1:5-11), for success with King Artaxerxes (1:4), when people opposed the building (4:4-5), and for strength (6:9). Several times he prayed that God would remember him for the work he had done.

Nehemiah’s objective in rebuilding the city walls and gates was not to create an empire for himself or to create great personal wealth. His motive throughout this work was to serve God. Nehemiah’s example of selflessness and willing service to God is important for us today. In the



rush to develop earth shaking new products that will catapult our companies into global prominence we should pause and reflect.

Consider the example of Nehemiah who cared greatly for God's people. He left a great job serving a king to live in a ruined city among the remnant of Judah. He faced opposition from outsiders, he dealt with laborers unskilled in their work, and people who made slaves out of their countrymen.

All this he did hoping only to please God. Ask yourself, "What motive is driving my work?"



Words to Ponder

The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. (NIV Deut. 28:7)

The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and will to carry on. Walter Lippmann

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (NIV Gal 6:2)

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. (NIV Heb. 6:10)

Wear your learning like your watch, in a private pocket, and do not pull it out and strike it merely to show that you have one. Lord Chesterfield

An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel. (NIV Prov. 18:19)

It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. (NIV Eccl. 7:5)



Cases in Real Life

BACKGROUND

A young manager is appointed to manage the re-launch of a line of soft drinks in a densely populated region with a very diverse socioeconomic makeup.

There are two flagship products and from these a number of line extensions will be introduced in several package sizes.

The product has been distributed direct to retailers by a distributor for years. However, in this region the product will now be tested using a broker sales force in the primary distribution channel.

You have one experienced sales manager managing the broker who calls on the headquarters and manages a sales force who calls on retail outlets.

The product is manufactured by a local contractor and there is a backup contract packer in a city 400 miles away.

You are charged with determining a local marketing strategy, controlling production and sales costs, and developing alternate channels of distribution. How do you go about delivering these expectations while maintaining profits?

ENABLED ORGANIZATION SOLUTION

First, you create a vision that includes people being able to purchase your product in all possible channels of distribution, in sizes and varieties that meet consumer needs.

Second, you create an initial strategy that includes local marketing, sales expectations, potential channels of distribution, and personnel needs.

Third, you obtain upper management support of your vision and initial strategy. Authorization is granted to proceed with the plan.

Fourth, you assemble your staff. Two more experienced sales managers are brought on board. One to manage the broker in the primary distribution channel and the other to develop the alternate distribution channels. You also get a local marketing expert who is familiar with marketing to your diverse customer base. Finally, you also recruit corporate experts on finance, production, and marketing to serve as advisors.

This group of people, along with senior members of the brokerage and the contract manufacturer serve as members of your multifunctional team.



Fifth, the assembled team is provided with the vision, and a basic outline of what business result is expected of each of them:

- The contract manufacturer is expected to maintain product quality at 100% service levels while controlling costs.
- Marketing is to develop a plan to generate trial and loyalty among the target consumers.
- Your sales managers are to work with the broker to develop each of the appropriate channels of distribution.
- The broker executives are responsible for managing their organization to deliver headquarter sales and retail sell-through.
- The corporate finance, marketing, and production people are to develop and recommend controls that will maximize profits, stabilize production, and create loyal consumers.

Sixth, each member of the team develops their own plan for how their work will be completed.

Seventh, at a team meeting each member discusses their plan. Each of the individual plans is modified to include feedback from other team members. From these individual plans a master plan is developed.

Eighth, at regularly scheduled meetings, each team member reports on the progress made since the last meeting. Discussion focuses on successes and setbacks. Suggestions from other team members are fed back into individual plans. But individuals are held accountable for their own work responsibilities.

Ninth, progress reports are provided to corporate on a regular basis. Feedback from corporate is incorporated into the master plan.

Tenth, quality work that exceeds expectations is recognized and rewarded on an ongoing basis.



Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes to: lead an expectations discussion, establish your role as an enabler, and how the group can become enablers for each other.

- Begin with a discussion of your vision. Let the group know what you are trying to accomplish.
- Clarify expectations.
 - 1) Give the group a list of your expectations of them. This might include work ethic, values, communication of bad news, how you hope to help them, etc.
 - 2) Ask the group to list their expectations of you.
- Review the difference between “teaching,” “coaching,” and “enabling.”
 - 1) Teaching is telling.
 - 2) Coaching is showing.
 - 3) Enabling is an organization empowered to teach and coach each other.
- Discuss the barriers to learning.
 - 1) Fear of the unknown.
 - 2) Resistance to change.
 - 3) Fear of appearing incompetent.
 - 4) Insecurity.
- Ask the group for examples of learning barriers in your organization.
- Discuss why the organization needs to become a group of enablers; increased job satisfaction, increased productivity, etc. Ask the group for other reasons.
- Lead a group discussion of how your organization can become enablers.



Action Keys for the Executive Enabler

Becoming an enabler and creating an enabled organization will give you a strategic advantage in the marketplace. Here are steps you can take to get started:

- ✓ Create a vision for the work to be done.
- ✓ Determine what work will need to be done to achieve the vision.
- ✓ Assemble the tools, resources, and personnel needed to complete the work.
- ✓ Lead a discussion of the vision with the employees. Discuss the need for an enabled organization.
- ✓ Throughout the project focus on the following eight characteristics of an enabled organization:
 - 1) Remove Barriers. Take steps to remove barriers to learning.
 - 2) Empower Employees. Give employees authority and get out of the way.’
 - 3) Encourage Risk Taking. Employees who take risks will deliver breakthrough performances.
 - 4) Leverage Diversity. Take advantage of every employee’s experience.
 - 5) Provide Autonomy. Make employees responsible for their own work quality.
 - 6) Motivate & Inspire. Money is not the only way to motivate or inspire employees.
 - 7) Reward & Recognize. Work that exceeds expectations should be recognized and rewarded.
 - 8) Encourage Followership. Not everyone is a leader but everyone is a follower. Recognize this skill.