

6 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE AUTONOMY

- Tracy Maylett

had to learn to make important issues.
autonomy /ɔːtɒnəmi/
1 Autonomy is the control of a country, organization, or individual by others. Activists fight for local autonomy last year. 2 Autonomy is the ability to make decisions without being told what to do.

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A FAVORITE COMMENT FROM A RECENT EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY WE CONDUCTED WITH A LARGE RETAIL CHAIN ECHOED THIS SENTIMENT:

"I REALLY ENJOY IT WHEN MY MANAGER YELLS AT ME IN HER SHRILL VOICE, CONSTANTLY TELLING ME WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT. IT MAKES ME WANT TO WORK HARDER."

THE SARCASM IS PALPABLE AND ALL TOO REAL.

Autonomy is one of the essential elements in building true employee engagement. Without it your workforce may become the "land of the working dead," roaming endlessly in zombie-like fashion, waiting to be told what to do next.

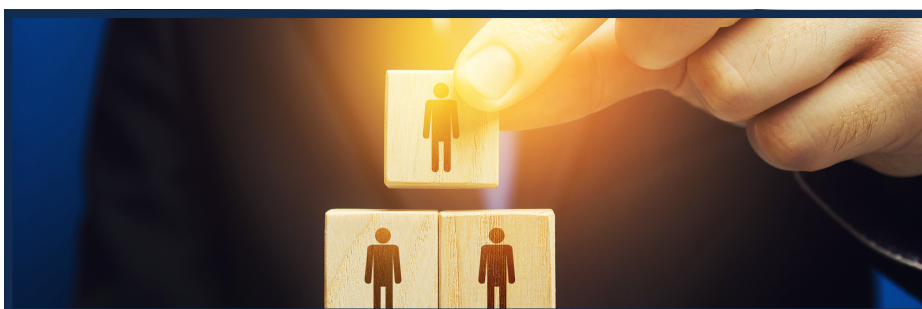
Not an enjoyable workplace for employees nor managers, by any stretch.

Who wants to be told what to do at every turn, and who wants to be the one babysitting? Perhaps there are the few that fit into both of these categories, but that doesn't cut it with good employees -- or good managers. That's where balanced and effective autonomy comes into play.

What autonomy IS.

There are many definitions of autonomy, but the one I find useful is:

"Autonomy is the power to shape your work environment in ways that allow you to perform at your best."



What autonomy is NOT.

So, let's take a better look at what autonomy is not:

- Autonomy does NOT mean working in isolation. Being autonomous doesn't give a person the right to work without supervision or collaborators.
- It's NOT doing whatever you like whenever you like. In an organization with high levels of autonomy, the employer defines the boundaries of the employee's control and decision-making power, creating the environment in which the employee can choose how autonomous he or she wishes to be.
- It's NOT working without a net. In a well-run organization, autonomous employees receive strong, clear guidance from supervisors, established procedures, manuals and so on. It's only dysfunctional organizations that employees are left to figure out their jobs with little or no input from management. That's not autonomy; that's lack of leadership.

With that being said, working solo can present many challenges, but there is also quite a few positives. This list of advantages is not intended to be exhaustive, but I do believe that it includes all the main benefits of working independently, and although it is not intended to replace teamwork, a balanced approach could have quite a few benefits.

1. Reduced Distractions

You may want to focus on your own workload, but all sorts of interruptions and hinderances can occur when you work with others. There can be interference from co-workers who want to chat to you, gossip, or seek your opinion on something trivial.

There can be co-workers loudly coming and going from the workplace, or indulging in noisy telephone conversations nearby. You can find yourself having to answer the phone, or door on behalf of others who are absent or busy.

2. Time Management Control

Independent working means that you often have much more power over your schedule. Work tasks can be put in the most efficient order, and fitted around non-work commitments, such as collecting the children from school, working out at the gym, or buying essentials from the store.

If you are in the mood, or need to get something done urgently, you can work long hours. If you are sorely in need a break, you can work less. You are not so beholden to the needs or whims of others.

3. No Reliance on Others

When you are working as part of a team, you are often dependent on others to give you vital pieces of information, complete their own work tasks, or supply you with certain equipment, so that you can do your own job effectively.

It can be very frustrating when others let you down. Some people can seem chronically unwilling or unable to do their job effectively. The constant back and forth is avoided when working independently.

4. Create choice within boundaries

While team responsibility can sometimes be preferable when things go badly and the blame is shared, it's frustrating when you do your job well and get the blame for a problem or mistake that was made by others.

It is also annoying when others steal the praise for your achievements. Solo working means that you have sole responsibility and don't have to be concerned with the performance of others.

5. Reduced Conflicts

Human relationships are rarely straightforward or entirely positive, and teams can often be breeding grounds for tensions caused by rivalries, jealousy, gossiping, bullying, as well as personality clashes.

The conflicts created can be stressful for workers to deal with, and result in much time and energy being expended on maintaining social relationships. Working solo means that you can focus on your work and not be concerned with potential social discord.

6. Innovation Boost

It is common for creative people to choose to work alone when they are coming up with new ideas, principally because it is often easier to innovate without the influence of others.

Groups have a tendency to take strong, unique, and quirky concepts and water them down. Peer pressure and self-censorship can cause people to only propose or come up with ideas that are conventional or derivative.

Don't grant autonomy to yourself or others if you as a manager isn't prepared to follow through with it.

Keep in mind that taking away autonomy once you've granted it is a surefire engagement killer.



**Now, get out of your own way and
do your thing!**

SOURCES:

- Why Volunteer? <https://growensemble.com/why-volunteer/>
- <https://toughnickel.com/business/Benefits-of-Working-Alone>