

Empowerment

Month 2 Leadership Challenge

Purpose

This challenge tests whether creating the conditions for thriving—through decision-making discretion, information sharing, civility, and feedback—improves work outcomes. The goal is not empowerment for its own sake, but sustainable high performance.

Why This Matters

Thriving employees—those who experience both vitality (feeling energized) and learning (gaining new knowledge and skills)—demonstrate 16% better overall performance, 125% less burnout, 32% more organizational commitment, and 46% higher job satisfaction than their peers. Thriving employees are not sprinters; they are marathon runners who deliver results sustainably.

The research identifies four organizational mechanisms that create thriving: providing decision-making discretion, sharing information, minimizing incivility, and offering performance feedback. This challenge asks you to implement elements of all four.

Spreitzer, G., & Porath, C. (2012). Creating sustainable performance. *Harvard business review*, 90(1), 92-99.

Your Challenge

Within the next 7 days:

1. **Identify a quality-relevant process.** Choose one routine task, decision, or workflow that directly affects patient outcomes, learner development, or care delivery—and that is typically defined or controlled by leadership.
2. **Provide decision-making discretion.** Work with the physicians, APPs, or staff involved to jointly define how the work will be done. Give them real authority over decisions that affect their work—not just execution, but design.
3. **Share information transparently.** Ensure people understand how their work connects to the organization's mission and strategy. Share relevant performance data so they can see the impact of their decisions.
4. **Establish feedback mechanisms.** Create a way for people to receive quick, direct feedback on outcomes—not just from you, but from the work itself. Feedback resolves uncertainty and keeps activities focused.
5. **Model civility.** Pay attention to the interpersonal climate. Research shows that incivility prevents thriving—people narrow their focus to avoid risk and lose opportunities to learn.

Guidelines

- Hold one structured conversation with the clinicians or staff involved.
- Ask at least three questions from the prompts below that address multiple mechanisms.

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- Choose an area where quality matters but risk is manageable (e.g., rounding processes, handoff protocols, teaching workflows, clinic scheduling, communication practices).

Example Prompts by Mechanism

Decision-Making Discretion:

- “What decisions do you need authority over to do this well?”
- “How would you approach this if you owned the outcome?”

Information Sharing:

- “What information do you need to make better decisions here?”
- “How does this work connect to our larger mission?”

Performance Feedback:

- “How would you know if this is working? What should we measure?”
- “What does quality look like from your perspective—for the patient, the learner, or the team?”

Civility and Climate:

- “What would make you feel safe trying new approaches here?”
- “What happens when mistakes occur? Does that help or hinder learning?”

Key Concepts from the Research

Thriving = Vitality + Learning: Vitality is feeling alive, passionate, and excited. Learning is gaining new knowledge and skills. Both are required—vitality without learning leads to burnout; learning without vitality leads to disengagement.

Four Mechanisms Work Together: Decision-making discretion, information sharing, minimizing incivility, and performance feedback reinforce each other. Letting people make decisions without information leaves them exposed. Sharing information without civility creates fear. One mechanism alone gets you part of the way; all four create a culture of thriving.

Performance Is the Goal: Satisfaction and engagement matter, but they are penultimate. The ultimate measure is whether outcomes improve. This challenge asks you to evaluate thriving by its effect on quality, not just by how people feel.

Mistakes Create Learning: The challenge for managers is to avoid cutting back on empowerment when people make mistakes. Those situations create the best conditions for learning—not only for the parties concerned but also for others who can learn vicariously.

Reflection Questions

After completing the challenge, reflect on the following:

1. Which of the four mechanisms did you address? Which were harder to implement?

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2. Did you see signs of increased vitality or learning in your team? What did that look like?
3. What information did people need that they didn't have? How did sharing it change their engagement?
4. Where did you feel the urge to take control back? What triggered that?
5. How did feedback mechanisms affect people's sense of ownership and focus?
6. What happened to the interpersonal climate during this challenge? Did civility improve or decline?
7. Do you expect quality or outcomes to improve, stay the same, or decline? What will make the difference?