

Leadership Curriculum

Lesson 6

Empowerment

Lesson Overview:

Students will continue the Leadership Curriculum by completing the following steps:

- 1) exploring and practicing ways to empower themselves
- 2) exploring ways to help empower others

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Leadership

Lesson 6 - Empowerment

Lesson Overview:

In this lesson students will explore the how personal empowerment and the ability to empower others

Time Frame:

1 - 2 Hours and time for students to complete independent work

Core Concepts:

- To be a strong leader, you must be empowered.
- Good leaders empower others.
- Empowerment involves skills you can learn and practice.

Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Explore the skills and characteristics that contribute to personal empowerment.
- Practice four steps that lead to personal empowerment.
- Consider opportunities and ways in which they can help to empower others to collective action.

Materials Needed:

- [Empowerment Slideshow](#), Parts I and II (self-empowerment) and Part III (empowering others)
- The Four Steps to Personal Empowerment Worksheet.

Supplemental Videos:

- [Empowerment Toolbox 1](#)
- [Empowerment Toolbox 2](#)
- [Empowerment Toolbox 3](#)

Step 1: Introduce the Lesson

Explain to students that in this lesson they will explore the concept of empowerment—what it is, why it's important, how they can develop it, and how they can help to empower others.

Step 2: Activate Background Knowledge

Lead students in a brief discussion of what it means to be empowered. Then ask students to take out notepaper and write a list of the skills and qualities they possess that make them feel empowered. Ask students to hang on to their lists to refer to during the slideshow.

Step 3: Present the Empowerment Slideshow

Present the slideshow, pausing occasionally to ask and answer questions. (See suggestions following slides.)

[Slide 1]

Part 1- The Empowerment Toolbox

You may find that you feel empowered in some situations and feel powerless or helpless in others. Reflecting upon the skills and characteristics that you use in the situations when you are empowered can help you to think about how you can transfer this “toolbox” to new and challenging situations.

The next several slides will present skill and characteristics that good leaders should have in their “Empowerment Toolbox.” As you read about the qualities on the slides, compare them to the personal list you made before the watching the slideshow. Is there any overlap? Think about how you can develop and use the qualities you may be lacking.

[Slide 2]

Tool 1: Confidence

In most situations, confidence can be critical to feeling and acting with empowerment.

Sometimes, confidence comes from mastering a particular skill or acquiring experience in a particular areas. Advance preparation and practice can improve your confidence. But confidence can also be a mindset.

For example, studies have shown that some people will apply for a job only if they meet 100% of the job requirements, while others will apply as long as they meet just 60% of the requirements. That is to say that while some people need to possess specific skills and experience to feel confident, others have a confident mindset— they feel confident in their ability to learn and master a job, even if they don't start out with all the necessary skills.

What if you have a tendency to question your abilities and preparedness? What if you don't feel confident all of the time? Since confidence can be more of a mindset than a true reflection of skills and abilities, you can develop confidence through practice without mastering every skill or ability

you might ever need. Some people call this “faking it till you make it.” In other words, put on the clothes that make you feel great, give yourself a power pep talk, stand up straight, and go out there and pretend that you know exactly what you’re doing. Pretty soon, you might just convince yourself!

[Slide 3]

Tool 2: Risk-taking/Bravery and Resilience

Risk-taking, or *bravery*, is closely tied to confidence. If people feel confident that they will be okay, even if they fail, then they may be more willing to approach new challenges, even when there’s a good chance of failure. That’s important, because often you can learn from your failures. That means that failing in the short-term can actually help lead to success in the long term.

As you learned in Lesson 5, resilience is the ability to persist and try again even after a failure. Having *resiliency* can make it easier to be brave and take risks.

[Slide 4]

Tool 3: Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to calmly and positively stand up for yourself and others. Assertive people are neither aggressive nor passive.

Being able to express yourself assertively can make your words more powerful and effective.

[Slide 5]

Tool 4: Self-Motivation

Sometimes the hardest thing about completing a task or achieving a goal can be getting started. *Self-motivation* – the internal drive to take action – is critical for personal empowerment.

There are many different things that can keep people from getting started. Perhaps we don’t know where to begin. Or we may feel overwhelmed by the options or concerned that if we do the “wrong” thing we will fail. Of course, if you have gotten this far in this lesson, you know that failure can actually help you move forward. Sometimes the best advice is just to “Do something. Do anything— even if it is wrong.”

Other times we are held back because we think that something isn’t our responsibility or that someone else will do it. Or maybe we are just waiting for someone else to *ask* us to do it. Of course, if everyone is thinking this same way, then nothing will ever get done! Keep in mind that initiative is a big part of self-motivation. That means taking on a responsibility without being asked, identifying a problem and finding a solution, or offering a helping hand when you see someone who could benefit from your skills and strengths. All of these acts make you stick out as someone willing to get the job done and make a difference.

If you are feeling a lack of self-motivation, you might ask yourself what is holding you back from getting started. Identify the barrier and then tear it down or jump right over it. If you are here and you have the skills, then YOU are the best person for the job. Do it!

[Slide 6]

Tool 5: Self-Awareness

Being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses can help to give you the confidence to take action.

Of course, you may or may not have all of the skills or strengths to be the best person for the job – or even a reasonably decent person for the job. That’s okay! In this case, you can choose to build skills that you lack or collaborate with others who may have the strengths or skills that you need to get the job done.

[Slide 7]

Tool 6: Willingness to Collaborate and Ask for Help

Do you have a friend who is very different from you, but somehow your differences complement one another rather than clash? Perhaps you are great at solving problems but have difficulty communicating your methods to others who hope to repeat your success. Your friend, on the other hand, may need help solving problems, but can articulate the solutions clearly and thoroughly to others.

Part of empowerment is *knowing what – and who – your resources are* and being unafraid to ask for help when needed and to work with others whose strengths and weaknesses balance out your own.

[Slide 8]

Tool 7: Acceptance of Limitations

"I focus on things within my control. This doesn't include things that occurred in the past, so I can devote my energy to creating strategies and plans to help move our team and mission forward."
~Alaina Percival, founding CEO of Women Who Code

Knowing what you can and cannot control ultimately gives you more power. You can stop trying to change things that are out of your control and focus your time and energy on tasks and issues that are within your control. For example, once you have sent off your application to that very prestigious and competitive university, you have no further control over whether you will be accepted. But you can take steps to make sure you are well-prepared to learn as much as possible and get an excellent education at whichever school you do end up attending.

David Evans, the author of *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life* calls problems that are out of your locus of control “gravity problems.” If you want to flap your arms and fly, gravity is a problem. However, it is a problem that can’t be changed. You cannot do anything

about gravity, so it isn't actionable. You may not like that, but if you spend time and energy trying to change it, you will only become tired and frustrated. Accept "gravity problems" as an unchangeable circumstance and turn your attention to problems and circumstances that you can solve or change.

[Slide 9]

Tool 8: Goal Setting

Goal-setting can be very empowering. A good goal expresses what you want to achieve and even outlines how you will achieve it. Once you have a plan, you have the power to follow the plan.

[Slide 10]

Tool 9: Positivity

You can do it!!! *Positivity* contributes greatly to confidence. If you can focus on the possible good outcomes and remain optimistic, you are much more likely to take action.

[Slide 11]

Tool 10: Action Orientation

People who are *action-oriented* tend to be self-motivated. They might make mistakes and fail sometimes. As you know, though, we learn from our mistakes and failures. Yes, it is okay to carefully consider options and to brainstorm ideas before you act. But at some point, you will need to take action.

[Slide 12]

Tool 11: Knowledge and Skills

In order to take action, you sometimes must know *how* to take action. You might need special skills or knowledge. Do not let the lack of a skill set or specialized knowledge hold you back. Instead, let it motivate you to learn more. Do you have an amazing idea for the perfect app to do something that would make lives better, but you don't know how to design apps? Take a class. Ask a friend. Look it up online. Knowledge is out there just waiting for you to learn it!

[Slide 13]

Part 2: Four Steps to Personal Empowerment

When you consider the many skills and characteristics involved, expanding your own personal empowerment may feel overwhelming. The four steps* described on the following slides can help you get started.

"It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."
—Madeleine Albright, first woman to become the US Secretary of State

*These four steps to personal empowerment were developed by Guy Winch, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist.

[Slide 14]

Step 1: Define Your Goal

Empowerment goes beyond a feeling of having personal power. Empowerment also means actually making an impact, effecting change, and bringing about specific outcomes.

In order to be empowered, you must know what goals you would like to accomplish. Setting a SMART Goal is a strong and effective way to begin effecting change in your own life or in your community.

Remember, SMART Goals are:

S – Specific

M – Measurable

A – Achievable

R – Relevant

T – Time bound

[Slide 15]

Step 2: Take Action

Once you have set a goal – especially if it is a SMART Goal – the next step is taking action toward accomplishing that goal. True empowerment implies taking action and having an impact.

Yes, taking action sometimes requires taking a risk. You may need to remind yourself that the possibility of failure to achieve your goal *this time* does not actually mean failure in the long term. Practice getting into the mindset that if you fail, you will be okay and that you will simply learn from any mistakes and try again.

Taking action may also require practicing or learning a new skill or knowledge set. Be sure to incorporate acquiring skills and knowledge into this SMART Goal or a previous one.

[Slide 16]

Step 3: Assess Your Impact

Assessing your impact may seem like a less important step in achieving personal empowerment. However, the time that you spend reflecting on your goal, your actions, and the impacts of your actions is critical to increasing your confidence and competence. If you have been effective in achieving your goals and having an impact, reflection can also help you to feel more assertive and effective.

But what happens if you don't achieve your goal? Or what if the goal you reach has unintended impacts or does not achieve the impact you expected? Does failure contribute to a *lack* of empowerment?

Not necessarily.

Again, failure can provide powerful learning opportunities. In fact, failure – if met with resilience and reflection – can be turned into success by using your new knowledge to inform your next attempt. If your first attempt at meeting your goal or having an impact does not work out as expected or hoped, use the information that your “failure” provides to adjust your goal and/or efforts the second time around. In this way, the step of assessing your impact can actually help you turn failure into empowerment.

(If dealing with failure is challenging for you, consider reviewing Lesson 5 for tips and tricks on how you can build your resilience.)

[Slide 17]

Step 4: Repeat Your Efforts

Developing personal empowerment takes practice and is a process. You may need to repeat the previous steps several times in order to achieve your goal.

The good news is that with each repetition of the process you will be building many of the skills necessary for personal empowerment. You will practice resilience as you try, try again. You will gain confidence and competence as you learn what works and does not work. You will practice taking risks and being brave. In the process you will not only achieve your goal, but you will also empower yourself to achieve other goals similar to this one as well as future goals that will require confidence, risk-taking, resilience, and an action-oriented mindset.

Step 4: Practice the Four Steps to Personal Empowerment (1 hour – 1 month)

Distribute the Four Steps to Personal Empowerment worksheet and explain that now it is time to practice personal empowerment! Ask students to consider something in their lives or in their community that they would like to change. What impact would they like to have? What results or changes would they like to effect?

Have students use the worksheet to set a goal, record their actions towards achieving the goal, assess their impact, and make a plan for repeating their efforts (if necessary).

Encourage students to take risks and set goals that are a bit of a stretch. Remind them that it is okay if they don't reach their goals the first time they try!

Step 5: Student-Teacher Discussions

When students have completed their worksheets, make time to discuss empowerment with each student. Use the following suggestions to help guide discussion:

- Besides the skills and characteristics listed in this lesson, what might the student need or find helpful for developing personal empowerment?
- Review the students' worksheets. Do you see additional lessons they can learn from the outcomes or impacts of achieving (or not achieving) their goals?
- Share your own experiences with empowerment. When do you feel powerful and capable? When do you feel less empowered? How have you developed your personal empowerment? How do you deal with "gravity problems" (circumstances outside of your control)?
- Ask him/her any other questions to clear up confusions or strengthen your own takeaways from the lesson.

Step 6: Present the Empowerment Slideshow, Part 3 (Empowering Others)

Remind students that the next focus of this lesson is how they can empower peers and others. Present the slideshow, pausing briefly after each slide to elicit and respond to any comments and questions students may have.

[Slide 18]

Part 3: Empowering Others: Introduction

It is easy to see how personal empowerment can be a strong leadership skill set. If you feel confident and empowered to lead, you will take action and you will lead—it's that simple.

Effective leadership involves empowering *others*, as well. If you can empower others to use their personal strengths, you can increase the overall strength of the group. If others are empowered to take control of different parts of a project, you empower them to be and act their best. The results and impact of the group will be exponentially greater than if you rely just upon one leader's ideas and impact.

Sometimes you will need help in achieving a goal. Empowering others to join you in achieving the goal will increase your chances of success and will expand the reach of your success to include others who have joined you, and potentially even others who have not been part of the project or effort. As a leader, you can organize an effort that offers opportunities for others to get involved in making a change or having an impact.

[Slide 19]

Why Empower Others?

I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back. —Malala Yousafzai

Sometimes we empower others simply because we can, because it is the right thing to do, and because it makes our community and our world a better place. We empower others because we know that our community and our world are made up of individuals who matter.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. ~ Margaret Mead, Cultural Anthropologist

In some cases empowering others helps us to make a difference on a grander scale or to change our community in powerful ways.

[Slide 20]

Grassroots Movements in STEM

The term “grassroots” refers to efforts that start at the bottom. In most cases, this means that the efforts empower ordinary citizens to take action rather than waiting for those in traditional leadership roles to make the necessary or desired changes. Traditional leadership might mean government leaders, but can also include institutional leaders, professional leaders, etc.

[Slide 21]

“Grassroots Science”

In the case of science, professionally educated scientists and engineers can also be seen as traditional leaders. New grassroots science efforts have worked to empower farmers, fisherman, and other “non-scientists” to use the scientific process to develop some of their own solutions and to have a voice in informing traditional STEM professionals about their challenges and their needs.

[Slide 22]

Group Empowerment and YOU

You may find that joining an existing group or movement is the best way for you to get involved and effect change in your community or in the world.

You may also find that you can identify changes that you would like to make in STEM or other areas in your own community. If there isn't already a group that you can join to make a difference, you may be motivated to gather other like-minded people together to get the job done. Maybe you would like to turn that empty lot down the street into a community garden. Perhaps you would like to raise self-esteem in your school. Maybe you would like to share a health message with others in your school or community. What changes would *you* like to see? Are there others in your school or community who would like to see the same change?

Step 4: Group Empowerment Brainstorm

(15 minutes)

Is there something that student would like to change in their community? Is there an effort they would like to join?

Invite students to brainstorm a list of ways that they could participate in group efforts to make changes for the good in their community or the world. Their list might include organizations or clubs that they could join or efforts that they could start from the “grassroots” level. For inspiration, share some of the resources at the end of this lesson or encourage students to conduct their own online search.

RESOURCES

Share the following resources to help students continue their exploration of empowering themselves and others.

SELF EMPOWERMENT

Confidence and Risk-Taking (TED Talks):

- [DARE to Step Outside Your Comfort Zone: Becky Blalock](#)
- [Life Begins at the Edge of Your Comfort Zone: Yubing Zhang](#)
- [Why I do something every day that scares me: Emma Van Der Merwe](#)

Assessing Personal Strengths (Survey):

The [VIA Survey](#) is a popular one that has a specific test for young people.

The Four Steps to Personal Empowerment (article):

[The Secret to Attaining Personal Empowerment](#)

EMPOWERING OTHERS

General

- [6 Ways to Empower People to Be Their Best](#)
- [15 Ways to Empower Others in 15 Minutes](#)
- [6 Ways to Empower Others to Succeed](#)
- [What Makes a Leader? The Ability to Empower Others](#)

Empowering Women and Girls, In and Outside STEM :

- [Elevate Network](#) (helping women advance in the workplace)
- [Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#)

- [Lean In](#)
- [Girls Out Loud](#)
- [#ILookLikeAnEngineer](#)
- [350.org](#)

Read about this global movement, and then look for local groups in your country or region.

Grassroots Empowerment in STEM:

- [Diversity, funding, and grassroots organizing](#)
- [People of the Year: Future of Research's post-doc activists](#)
- [Bringing grassroots organizing and science to Vandana Shiva](#)
- [More Than Scientists](#)
- [A grassroots revolution](#)

More about Grassroots Science

- [Q&A: Getting Science to the Grassroots in Africa](#) (Audio file/podcast)
- [India needs grassroots innovations, say scientists](#)

More About Group Empowerment and You (TED Talks)

- [Derek Sivers – How to start a movement](#)
- [Jessica Posner – Building Community](#)
- [Dara Frimmer – Inspiring social change through community organizing](#)