

Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment

The way it had always been: Managers did the thinking, Supervisors did the talking, and employees did the doing. This is not very satisfying for the employees who often have the best ideas to improve sales, quality & efficiency. When employees are not empowered they tend to not get excited, don't do anything they have to do, do as little as possible, no accountability, no improvements, no motivation.

The Story: An Employee named Ralph developed a machine called the Ralpolator which took him and his boss Joe to the 12th dimension where they could see things they couldn't normally see in their workplace like how people feel, what's going on in their minds, what it's like for them on the inside. Joe had no idea people were this unhappy by their work. Ralph explained to his boss, Joe, that it was dark in the 12th dimension because all of the light comes from within people and they were dim and dull. Some employees had light, but it didn't shine very far beyond themselves. Before leaving the 12th dimension, Ralph took Joe to a different department in their company Dept. Z. These people radiated energy that lit up the place. Some were brighter than others, but the collective brilliance of all of them was like a small, warm sun. Some worked alone, some in groups, but the light connected them in a common purpose. They called Lucy the manager the "wizard" and she ZAPPED people to help solve difficult problems – all they needed was a ZAPP of lightning and they talked between each other with their little flickers of lightning passing among them. Together, they could do amazing things.

Back in the real world, Lucy from Dept Z gave them a tour – each person they met there proudly explained part of what Dept Z did, yet nobody seemed bored. The difference here is that people are involved in what they were doing. Joe and Ralph could no longer see the lightning, but they knew it was there. People moved, walked and talked with purpose. Lucy told stories in front of her employees about how proud she was of them taking initiative and solving problems to make Dept Z a better place. Joe thought Lucy just hired better employees, or had better equipment than he did. No, all of her employees were sent from Personnel, and it is the same equipment and systems that every other department has. Lucy said she just does her best to keep them charged up.

Ralph and Joe went back to their Dept N and all of the employees were complaining and trying to think of ways to get out of their work. Ralph thought that now that Joe knew what he did things would be different, but it wasn't so. Joe's boss Mary yelled at Joe, Joe in turn gave Ralph a 3 day suspension for working on the Ralpholator, which was an unapproved project.

But, Joe began thinking over the next few days. Why did he run a department where people only cared about quitting time while Lucy ran a department where people really cared about making things better and better? How come he kept getting yelled at by his boss, while she could deliver great performance with even a lean staff? Joe decided the answer was Zapp. If he could figure out what Zapp is and use it in his department, performance would improve and his boss would stop yelling, work would be more fun, life would be simpler and he could have professional success.

The smart thing would be for Joe to go to Lucy and ask what she was doing, but he was too proud. He tried 5 minute pep-talks at the beginning of the shift but it never motivated any of his people for very long. Then he tried being a nice guy, but even though people were nice back it did little to improve work performance. Then, he thought he would be Mr. Mean, but that was no more effective and made things even worse. But, as he asked around he found out Lucy never acted in that way, yet her people applied themselves to their work. Lastly, he thought Money was the answer, so he checked and found Dept Z had the normal pay plans with no special incentives.

He then read a book on Participative Management which involves employees in the decision making process. Employee Involvement is key here, and it means more than just asking employees for help, having work teams, or having a lot of group meetings or being overly friendly to employees.

Ralph came back to work, and had the lowest morale of anyone in Dept N. Joe was finally ready to ask Lucy what her secret was and went to Ralph for help. Ralph reluctantly agreed to help Joe after Joe explained that Ralph would be part of bringing the lightning bolt to Dept N. If they were in the 12th Dimension, they would see lightning bolts between them right now! They fired up the Ralpholator, and found Dept N as dim and gloomy as it was that first day. This time, though, they saw not flashes of light (ZAPP)

but flashes of night (SAPP), it kind of sounded like a balloon deflating. Every time an employee made a negative comment, they heard SAPP! Every time Joe saw himself solving problems for employees instead of helping them work though it themselves they heard SAPP. The truth is, that when these things happened, people got dimmer and slower instead of brighter and faster. It was keeping people divided and confined, draining their energy or damming it up so it could not be used. Joe saw himself going through Sapping people left and right all day. He was like a black hole absorbing energy from everyone who works for him. No wonder people rushed home, Joe thought, when they saw the light from the outside, from their family and friends they rushed toward it for the fix of energy they needed. Ralph realized that Joe Sapped from everyone else Responsibility, Authority, Identity, Energy and Power while never sharing it with others.

Joe and Ralph walked invisibly through other Departments and found the same thing. In the Marketing Department, a salesperson was talking to an angry customer. The salesperson had no training in handling difficult customers, no knowledge of how to fix the customer's problem, and no authority to do much of anything except sit there and take it. Sapp! In another department a memo went up that said management would be monitoring the arrival times of all employees in the morning and reported daily. Sapp! Overall there was much Sapping and little Zapping going on. Joe and Ralph came back to the normal world and came up with conclusions:

What Sapps people was confusion, lack of trust, not being listened to, no time to solve problems, someone solving problems for you, not knowing if you are succeeding, strict rules and regulations, a boss taking credit for other's ideas, not enough resources to do the job well, believing that you can not make a difference, a job simplified to the point that it has no meaning, and people treated exactly the same like interchangeable parts. To put simply, a lack of esteem and control sapps people, and more confidence and trust zapps people. ZAPP is the giving of power and SAPP is the taking of power.

They went back to Dept Z in the 12th dimension and invisible to the employees and noticed the people pretty much ran their own jobs. They could make lots of decisions on their own, and they acted as if their jobs were important to them. They went home only after a job was done so they had a sense of accomplishment. In Dept N, conversely, employees couldn't

make any decisions without checking with Joe first, and they left work when a buzzer sounded. Joe and Ralph noticed quickly that when you are Sapped you feel like your job belongs to the company, you are just doing what you are told, your job doesn't really matter, you have to keep your mouth shut and you never know how well you are doing. When you have been Zapped, you feel like your job belongs to you, you are responsible, your job counts, you know where you stand, you have some say in how things are done, and you have control over your work. What Zapps people is Responsibility, Trust, Being listened to, Teams, Solving problems as a team, Praise, Recognition for ideas, Flexible controls, Direction, Knowledge, Support, Resources and upward and downward communications.

The Zapping of Dept N:

Joe oversimplified what he had learned. He began to just tell people that their jobs belong to them, that they could decide how they wanted to do their jobs, they were in control, and that he wasn't making any more decisions for them. He told them that their jobs were now important, so they should start acting like it. None of the employees understood what Joe was talking about. Some employees decided to take a break for the rest of the day, and arguments broke out about which way was the best way to do the job. After spending so much time in Sapp, they didn't know what to do. Joe realized it is easy to Sapp, and hard to Zapp. Ralph told Joe that he had never seen Lucy talk people into being Zapped. Ralph followed Lucy to see exactly what she did and reported back to Joe. He noticed that whenever she talked to someone, she didn't put the person down or make the person feel inferior. Even if there was a problem, she said what she had to say so that people still felt if not great, at least OK about themselves. This always maintained or enhanced a person's self-esteem.

Then, Joe began telling people nice things about themselves, but not their work. So, they remained un-Zapped. Lucy goes out of her way to talk about the things they're doing on the job. And, she never puts people down even if there is a problem. Joe then began complimenting people on their work, on how well they keep their work area clean, on how quickly they do their job. After these compliments, Ralph swore he saw little flickers of lightning. They were small, barely visible, but they were there. Joe kept using words that would maintain people's self-esteem when he talked to them about their work. He went out of his way to build self-esteem, making a point to try to say something constructive to each person in the department several times every day. After all those years of being Sapped, he thought it would take

lots of little Zapps to build up a positive charge in people. People could tell if Joe was not being sincere, so the quality of what he was saying was critical. In fact, people were Sapped when Joe made false praise. As time went on Joe saw little flickers of lightning in Dept N grow brighter. It was time to take the next step.

The next thing Ralph noticed about Lucy was that she let other people do the talking. She would really listen, and as this happened a little Zapp would pass between her and the person talking. Lucy never does other things while others are talking to her and she always lets people finish what they have to say and not change the subject when they do finish. Lucy looks at the person talking, nods her head, and she REPEATS a little summary of what had been said. Joe started practicing this, but found it hard to do when he was trying to repeat back to them what they had said. He wasn't really listening as well as he thought. He had to practice not cluttering up his mind with thoughts of what others were saying, or what he would say next. He had to keep a mental list of the points they were making so he could repeat them back.

Ralph would go to the 12th dimension to check up on how Joe was doing and found that just by maintaining self-esteem and by listening to people, the Sapps had become far fewer and the Zapps far greater. There was now a weak, but definite glow now around Dept N. Ralph no longer had to go to the 12th dimension to see that there was less tension in the department, problems seemed to get sorted out faster and the work flow seemed to be a little smoother. However, Joe was not getting the maximum Zapps that he could because he didn't realize that in addition to LISTENING, he had to RESPOND WITH EMPATHY. Saying something like, "OK, I sense that you are very frustrated, why don't you work on something else and I will get you the help you need" went much further in maximizing the Zapp factor. When someone would come to Joe with a problem, he began to say, "OK, I understand you are upset, let's try to work something out." When someone would come to Joe with a request, he would say, "I sense that this is important to you. We'll see what we can do." Even when there was requests that had to be denied, or problems that just had to be endured, when Joe would say, "I know this is tough for you, but there's nothing we can do right now. Meanwhile, it's important to all of us that you hang in there and do the best you can" still provided a Zapp. People still knew they had been heard and considered and that their boss was with them and not against them.

There are always “dragons” that creep into organizations to make the Zapp harder to achieve. Ralph saw a dragon come to Dept N one day on his newly developed Zappometer which measures Sapp-Zapp ratios. Ralph noticed that even though Dept N was a far brighter place, as soon as Joe would leave, the lightning wouldn’t last long on its own. The dragon came, in the form of the computer crashing, parts arriving late and defective parts. Joe, who was doing so well with Zapps, took control not empowering others to fight the dragon. Sapp. He was enjoying fighting the fires, but it got out of control and he couldn’t do it alone. Yet, he hadn’t empowered anyone else to help so everyone just walked out and left him to fight alone. He couldn’t do it, and his boss Mary Ellen took the hose away to do it herself. Sapp. Joe went to see how Lucy handled the dragon in Dept Z. Lucy did not try to solve the problem of the dragon on her own. She went to the person nearest the fire hose and said, “we have a problem and I need your help”. Zapp! And that person picked up the fire hose, while Lucy pulled together others and said, “we have a big problem and I need your help”. Zapp! Zapp! Zapp! Those people began talking amongst themselves to figure out what to do. When Lucy returned, they had an action plan worked out. They fought the dragon faster and more efficiently than any other department. The Zapp glowed even brighter than before in Dept Z as people were charged up after meeting the challenge.

3RD STEP OF ZAPP; ASK FOR HELP AND ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT.

Joe called a meeting and asked why they were having so many problems? He told them he thought they were all reasonable and smart people and that every day they saw what was going on, and that they probably had some good notions about what the problem was. Zapp! Joe listened to what each one of them had to say and made a list of their theories. Zapp! They narrowed the list, tested those ideas and one of them turned out to be the cause of the problem. But then, Joe took the problem away from them and solved it himself. Sapp! Joe thought it was his job to come up with solutions, but he realized people are more likely to carry through with solutions if they had a stake in making it work. If they don’t own it, it wasn’t their solution. They also have to IMPLEMENT it to have full buy-in. The best scenario is when people own the problem, the idea for solving it, and the challenge of making the idea succeed. Joe quickly realized that some people became scared with the brightness of the Zapp. Their self-

confidence wore thin. He realized they needed smaller bolts of Zapp which would not blow their fuses. Most of them, though, took the high-voltage Zapp and carried it back to their work just fine. The next time the dragon came, the employees knew the action plan and no longer waited for Joe to solve the problem or tell them what to do. Things were not perfect, but the fires were put out much more quickly than before. “We did it!” they all said to each other proudly.

THE SOUL OF ZAPP! OFFER HELP WITHOUT REMOVING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

THE FIRST THREE STEPS OF ZAPPING OTHERS...

1. MAINTAIN SELF-ESTEEM
2. LISTEN AND RESPOND WITH EMPATHY
3. ASK FOR HELP AND ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT

LEAD TO THE SOUL OF ZAPP:

OFFER HELP WITHOUT REMOVING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

Dept N began to experience the power of Zapp, and people felt energized about their work. Joe thought he would feel like a hero, but he was more scared and confused as ever. He just wasn't sure people could live up to their responsibility to do things right – he had to trust people which is not easy to do. He was afraid of taking the heat from his boss if things are done incorrectly since he is letting other people do them. Joe ended up delegating all of the items on his plate, and for the most important items he set up a check by asking the employee to call him at 2pm. That way, if Joe's help was needed he could still provide it. The only task he kept for himself was one that no one else could do, the budget. This was how Joe began to realize that control was a question of what to delegate, and how often to check on how people were doing. He could refer a task completely away, or delegate the task without giving decision-making authority, or keep the task for himself.

Joe decided to never abandon his responsibility through delegation. Through Zapp people gain responsibility in their individual jobs, but he still has the responsibility to know what is going on, set the direction, make the decisions they can't, ensure people are on course, offer a guiding hand, open doors to clear the way, assess performance and be a smart manager.

Zapp does not guide action, it excites action. To get the job done, a good manager has to channel the action to the right direction. But how? Joe tried having more meetings, but meetings took lots of time away from the job. To channel action, Joe decided to mutually establish a **KEY RESULT AREA** (the direction we want to go like Increase Output), **MEASUREMENT** (a way to know we are moving in the right direction like # of units moved), and **GOAL** (something to tell us if we are there yet like 10% increase). Another Key Result area could be Customer Satisfaction. Now, everyone knew what was important and each person had personal goals to help meet the department goal and the company goal. They knew what was important, why it was important, and why they were important and had a place in the big picture. Zapp!!

Joe realized people wanted to know **EXACTLY** how they were doing. An answer like, “OK” wasn’t cutting it anymore. Large chalkboards solved this problem. Each person could see the goals and graphed how they were doing. Joe taught people how to update their **OWN** charts, which gave people stronger ownership. Joe didn’t have to be the “bad guy” when things weren’t going well. People could see it themselves, and seemed to work harder to improve them more quickly. But, goals changed. They were no longer based on output, but on to deliver exactly the kind of output needed by the other department within 10 minutes of them needing it. Changing the goal changed the direction, and it was done with Zapp!

The importance of Coaching – Joe realized that many people need coaching on how to do their jobs. Coaching steps:

- Explain the importance of what you are trying to teach
- Explain the process to be used
- Show how it’s done & observe while the person practices
- Provide immediate feedback and specific; express confidence in the person’s ability to be successful
- Agree on follow-up actions

Joe shifted to coaching people **BEFORE** the newly assigned project was started so people would Start out doing it correctly. People learn faster from successes than failures. Learning about your job boosts your Zapp!

For Zapp to work people need

- DIRECTION** key result areas, goals, measurements
- KNOWLEDGE** skills, training, information & goals

RESOURCES	tools, materials, facilities & money
SUPPORT	approval, coaching, feedback & encouragement

However, Joe found that it was harder, not easier, over time to keep people Zapped. He got discouraged but then noticed that Lucy's team had "Super Zapp", more Zapp than ever before and they were working in Teams. When they went to the 12th Dimension to see what was going on, they saw that Lucy wasn't doing the Zapping anymore, instead it was generated by the group itself. Lucy told Joe that having a group of Zapped individuals is simply not as productive as having them enZapped as a team. It is hard to keep building Zapp on an individual level, there are limits to what you can do to enZapp one person. Lucy's teams are semi-autonomous, meaning she still points the direction and assesses performance and helps with things, but the team learns to run itself. A Zapp team works with less and less supervision over time. Once given its mission, the team becomes self-governing and carries the burden of responsibility for accomplishing its goals.

Joe went to his group and asked for THEIR HELP in setting up teams. Joe worked with each team to establish a mission, and each individual had a role in that mission. Joe made sure everyone understood how each team's mission fit with the overall mission of the department and for the entire company. He made sure each team had its own measurements, and that they set up their own scoreboard to show how well it was doing. From then on, when Joe asked for helping solving a big problem, he asked the team. When he offered help, he offered help to the team. Day by day, the Zapp grew within the teams. They came to life and generated a spirit of their own.

How to boost the voltage of Zapp Teams:

- Give the team a say in who works on the team
- Establish a mission for the team
- Provide time and places for the team to meet
- Provide technical training at the teachable moment
- Provide people skills for interacting, solving problems, making decisions and taking actions.

Zapp Teams can take on lots of responsibility like:

- Determine who works on what
- Handle absenteeism, and performance issues
- Get involved with all aspects of their work

Select their own team leader from their ranks
Find opportunities to improve quality and productivity
Perform basic maintenance and even schedule vacations

THE ZAPPED COMPANY

By far, the most important enZapping influence is the supervisor or manager to whom the employee directly reports.

Management has specific role in spreading Zapp:

1. To protect people from the Sapping things that the company attempts to put on them while supporting the Zapping things the company has to offer.
2. To be sure that subordinate managers have the skills required to Zapp, and if not get them into training.
3. To Model Zapp
4. To coach subordinate managers in how to use and improve their Zapp skills
5. To reward performance resulting from Zapp

Overall: To create an environment where Zapp can happen.

Department N had become so productive, that some employees did not have enough work to do, so Mary Ellen engaged Zapp Teams of underutilized employees to look into developing new business units. She flattened the company by making these teams more equal to her.

Flattening the organization Zapps! FATtening the company Sapps!

Dept N ended up making the Ralpholator Machine a new business unit so that it could help all departments and all people see the power of Zapp!

Joe went out in the 12th Dimension observation deck, where he could see the all major companies from the outside. Most companies looked like huge, complex castles with dragons flying around trying to knock the castles down. Joe's entire company had its castle flattened and resembled more of a launch pad, a home base for people who, each morning, took off in a wide-ranging fleet of amazing craft designed with the help of those who flew them, and each liftoff propelled by the energy of Zapp. Joe believed that as

his entire company got better and better that the dragons will get smaller and smaller because they have less to feed on.