



Ten Minutes of Your Time. Lasting Business Impact.

**Issue 9
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"I'm not at a decision-making level in my company."

- Parts Fulfillment Coordinator for Major Equipment Manufacturer

From the CEO's Desk

Do You Own, Or Just Rent?

I work with a lot of companies and I'm constantly impressed by the people I meet. Many are smart. Most are hard-working. Some are very well-educated. And a surprising number are simply renting their jobs on a weekly basis.

You know what I mean. Owners fix the leaky faucet; renters call the landlord. Owners know their neighbors; renters don't bother. Owners get more living space by remodeling; renters increase their square footage by moving. Owners invest a down payment and take out a 30-year mortgage; renters surrender a security deposit and sign a six-month lease.

To be sure, renters can be part of the fabric of any great community, but no truly great organization is primarily composed of renters. Organizations become great when they demonstrate the capacity for change, and finding success over time takes teamwork and commitment that isn't usually found in people who are renting their jobs. So when you consider your organization today and your vision for the future, ask the following questions: Are your people renters or owners? And just for the record, are YOU renting or do you own your job?

Before you answer, consider this: I've known temporary employees who have owned their jobs and 30-year veterans who were still renting. Junior members of ad-hoc project teams can be passionate about their projects, and senior executives can be disengaged and waiting for a better opportunity. The difference between renters and owners is not one of status or tenure, but how they approach their daily activities. Ownership is a mindset.

If you're an owner, you know what I mean. Leaders constantly ask people to "take ownership" of issues, but this requires the leader to let go of the decision-making process, and it also requires the team member to accept decision-making authority.

Throughout the day, leaders at all levels of the organization face a constant choice: do they explicitly direct the activities of their people, or do they allow people to make decisions within some parameters? Workers at all levels in the organization also face daily choices: do they wait for instructions, or do they take initiative?

The outcome of these choices creates a pattern of renters or owners within a company. How do you get people to own their areas? You must empower them to make decisions in accordance with the company's values and goals. You must reward those who make decisions within this framework. You must ensure they feel accountable for their actions.

Leaders must constantly reinforce the organization's values, goals, and policies - particularly when those parameters are dynamic. When operating conditions change, leaders can tighten or loosen the decision-making parameters, and they can review decisions to ensure proper judgment is being exercised. But if decision-making authority properly rests below them, they should resist making the decision themselves. Doing so may be expedient in the short-term, but in the long-term this contributes to uncertain lines of authority and can make people hesitant to act until this uncertainty is resolved.

In turn, employees must do their part. First, they must appreciate their ability to influence their working environment. We are all decision-makers, as we face numerous decisions each day about the work we produce, how we interact with immediate customers and suppliers, and our attitude on the job.

Second, employees must see that taking responsibility has benefits. It can be a path to learning and a way to build leadership skills, may help individuals play a greater role in fulfilling the organization's mission, and is one means to earn financial rewards such as promotions, raises, or bonuses. This individual motivation for greater responsibility also creates the feedback loop for good decision-making. As people see their decisions impacting their learning, satisfaction, and finances - those items they value - good decisions are maximized and poor decisions are not repeated.

Last, for employees who feel they have too little authority, remember: even senior managers have limits on their power. Also, remember: each of them started out just like you. By using good judgment and creativity within their sphere of influence, they demonstrated both an appetite and track record for expanded responsibilities. Since using authority wisely is the best way to get more, a little is all you need.

Before you start your personal or organizational transformation to ownership, assess your current environment:

- What authority do you have today?
- Where has authority to make decisions been explicitly or subtly denied?
- How do your organization's values aid in making decisions?
- How do you define renters and owners within your organization?
- What benefits would your company's renters gain from becoming owners, and how

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could you position these benefits to them?
- How can you expand decision-making authority over time?

By Kevin Weiss
CEO of Philip Crosby Associates and The Capability Group

Want to learn more...

about corporate cultures that promote owning, not renting?
Email us at info@philipcrosby.com.

About Take Ten Minutes

Take Ten Minutes is a weekly publication of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) and [The Capability Group](#).

The premise behind *Take Ten Minutes* is simple: take ten minutes out of every week to refocus and recommit to business improvement. *Take Ten Minutes* features quotes and interviews to inspire you. We also pull articles from today's headlines as examples of the power of the preventive culture (or the deep problems caused by not having one).

As the name suggests, *Take Ten Minutes* is relentless with the editing razor and keeps each issue tight - each issue should take you no more than ten minutes to read, start to finish. You'll reap even bigger rewards if you kick in an extra ten minutes to discuss the ideas with a colleague or to take an idea found here and plan to roll it out in your organization. We hope *Take Ten Minutes* becomes the business improvement equivalent of your running partner, providing the inspiration you need to lace up and "just do it" on those weeks when the couch seems oh-so preferable.

We hope you enjoy *Take Ten Minutes*. As Philip Crosby said, improving your business "is a journey that never ends." So let the journey...*continue!*

Please send story ideas or comments to our [editor](#).

About Our Companies

In today's marketplace, only capable companies will survive and thrive. The overarching goal of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) (PCA) and [The Capability Group](#) (TCG) is to give companies the culture, tools, methodology and results-focused support to become 'Capable Organizations' - useful, reliable, adaptable, and ever-focused on achieving customer success.

PCA and TCG deliver on this goal by first working with clients to assess where they are on the maturity spectrum and where they want to go. For companies early in the process, we work hand-in-hand with management to install a culture of prevention - the culture that has been championed by the PCA side of our business since quality management guru and PCA founder Philip Crosby published *Quality is Free* in 1979. Over the past two decades, Crosby's techniques

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