

THE RELIGION OF EMPOWERMENT AT DISNEY

I have a driving passion for introducing companies to the power of awesome customer service. It's the focus of my books, and I've been passionate about it and preached about it for longer than I can remember.

That's because the results are breathtaking. Delivering exemplary service to everyone who walks through your door is well known to increase customer retention; generate priceless word of mouth that boosts new sales; expand market share; improve financial vitality and build your company's positive reputation in your community.

Disney World has such extreme dedication to delivering exceptional customer service and empowering its employees that it's well nigh a religion. Disney trains its employees thoroughly and then gives them the authority to do whatever it takes to deal with problems instantly, on the spot, to keep the customer happy. Disney's core values stack up alongside other great companies such as Amazon ("Customer Obsession"), Apple ("Insanely Great Customer Service"), and Starbucks ("Creating a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome").

Disney World believes its front-line employees should be the first and last contact the customer will ever need. These employees, and all Disney employees, are treated with respect.

There are four roadblocks that most companies today would do well to remove if they want to develop a truly empowered workforce:

1. Fear – Employees fear that they'll be fired for making empowered decisions, and employers fear that their customers and employees will abuse empowerment. But when you train your employees well and support their decisions, you eliminate those fears and inspire your employees to be creative yet responsible in serving your customers.

Disney's philosophy is reflected in a statement that every organization in America that seeks to earn the customer's loyalty would do well to hammer on its boardroom wall: "Management Must Not Only Support the Front Line, But Must TRUST It as Well."

2. Distrust – Employers must trust their employees to make decisions that will keep their customers coming back. Employees must be able to trust that their employers won't deride, or worse, fire them if they make a mistake while attempting to solve a customer's problem.

When James Poisant was manager of business seminars at Walt Disney World, he said, "If a supervisor notices a front line person giving away the store, he'll usually wait and talk it over

with him later." Note well – he will wait instead of intervening.

3. Micromanagement – Nothing kills empowerment faster and more surely than micromanagement. When you micromanage your employees, you destroy their capacity for even the most basic creative thinking and problem solving. Let your employees know what you need from them, then get out of the way and let them do what you've asked them to do

When you walk up to a guest relations window at EPCOT Center to register a complaint or ask for refund of your money, the employee will more than likely act in your favor immediately and send you away happy. Management interference is discouraged.

4. Lack of Recognition – Everyone needs to be praised when they're doing something well. But too often the only time employees receive feedback at all is when they've made a mistake. The more you recognize the empowered decisions and achievements of your employees, the more likely they will use their creativity in dealing with situations in the future.

Cast members (as Disney World calls its front-line employees) do not say, "That's not my job, I'll get a supervisor." When people call Disney World with problems, the first employee who answers the phone makes an effort, a heroic effort if necessary, to solve the problem. The employee does NOT send the caller all over the company.

Eliminate these four roadblocks and you'll be well on the way toward creating an empowered team that will drive your business and crush your competition

Disney realizes great financial benefits for its commitment to quality service. Because clients are willing to pay for helpfulness, friendliness, cleanliness, and fun, Disney's facilities are able to charge admissions that are roughly 20% higher than any other major entertainment center in Florida or California. And Disney's stock prices are high.

Empower employees to act in the customer's favor on the spot. **RO**

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