

Empowerment is Power in Customer Service

By: John Tschohl

Empowerment means every employee has to make fast decisions in favor of the customer at every single encounter. Mistakes are inevitable and it's important to recognize and accept this fact of life. The only way we can do that is by empowering employees to satisfy the customer quickly and to their satisfaction.

Empowerment is the backbone of customer service. I have stated in my books and in my seminars that it's impossible to be a service leader, to be customer centric and focus on a service strategy without empowering employees. My definition of empowerment is giving employees the authority to do whatever it takes, on the spot, to take care of a customer to that customer's satisfaction—not to the organization's satisfaction.

Most employees are rule and process driven. Empowerment is by far the hardest skill to get employees to use. I have always said it takes 2 miracles at one time to get an employee to spend \$20 of your money. Almost all employees assume they will be immediately fired if they make a decision in favor of the customer, when in fact, most decisions require no money and about 80% will cost under \$50. (Actually most for under \$20.00) This is inexpensive marketing money. Your focus should be to create word-of-mouth advertising.

Most leaders are not using empowerment to power their business. Too many executives think employees are born with good customer service skills. It's important to encourage employees to make fast decision in favor of the customer. Doing so requires decision making and rule breaking and bending to do what they see fit if they believe it is the right thing to do for the customer—exactly what the employee has been conditioned against. Telling the employee to follow the rules and policies is not empowerment.



In my book Empowerment a Way of Life, I illustrate four challenges that all businesses face. They are:

1st. Many executives don't trust the customer.

They believe the customer is trying to take advantage of them. Employees feel that customers are out to rip off the company because that is what they are taught.

2nd. We don't trust employees. We pay them as little as we can and have even less confidence in their ability to make decisions. We have a belief that our lying, cheating customers are going to take advantage of our incompetent employees.

3rd. With Empowerment you don't need as many managers and supervisors. Customers should not have to wait to be handled by someone up the chain of command. It should be handled by the employee on the spot to the customer's satisfaction. (Most managers and supervisors are not overly excited about losing their perceived power and jobs).

4th. Very few employees are on their knees at night praying for Empowerment. It's just too risky. They fear their act of satisfying the customer will cost them money from their paycheck or worse, the loss of their job.

Eliminate these four roadblocks and you'll have an empowered team that will drive your business and crush your competition.

Keep in mind what's important to achieve your goals:

It is important to train employees on empowerment and trust them. There are no schools in the world that will teach this skill. It is up to your firm. Satisfying customers quickly benefits everyone. Moreover, happy, empowered, fulfilled employees are the key to creating "over-happy customers" for your company.

It's important to recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate efforts that have created "over-happy customers". Make it a big deal, a big celebration and not only will the employee be over-happy, so will others on your team. It shows the company is serious about making each transaction with employees and customers valuable and awesome. It's important to have "over-happy" customers.

Remember, your over-happy customers will reciprocate your helpful actions. When you respond to their needs, most customers will pay you back with continued or increased loyalty, goodwill and even repurchasing.

Join me in spreading the word. The success you enjoy will be because you have empowered your people to help other people get what they want. - John Tschohl

About the Author: John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. He is the President and founder of Service Quality Institute (the global leader in customer service) with operations in over 40 countries. John has written several books on customer service including *Moving Up, A step-by-step Guide to Creating Your Success* and has available the 13th edition of *AETCS*. Both books are available on Amazon. John is a self-made millionaire traveling and speaking more than 50 times each year. He is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment and customer service in the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



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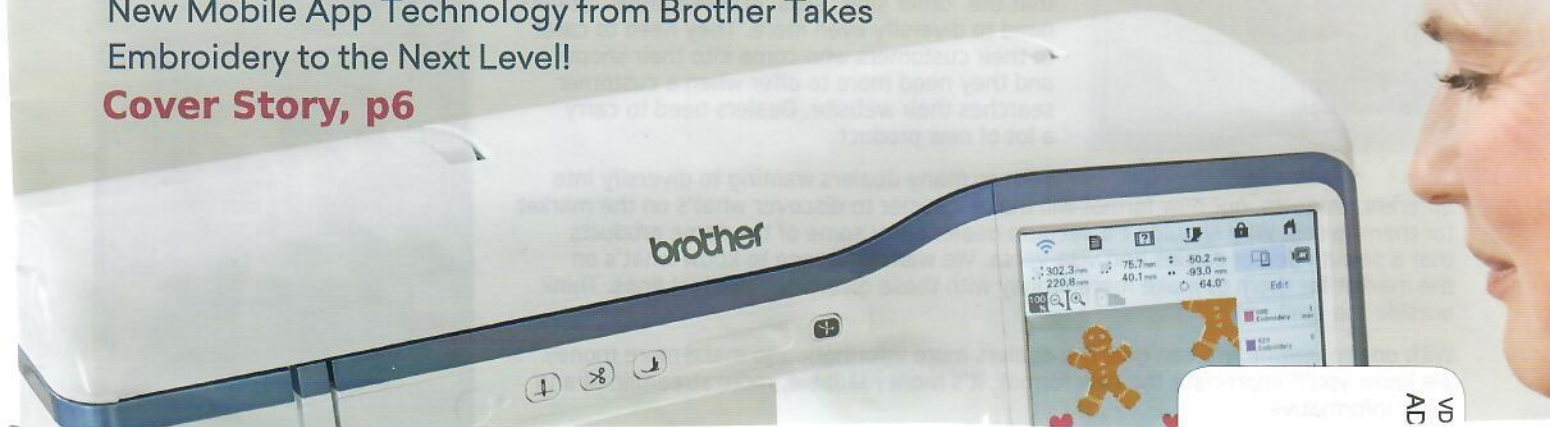
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