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JOURNAL

VOLUME 36/NO 1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020

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American Fastener Journal  
6759 Oakfair Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43235

# 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 two 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 decisions 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:

1. 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.
2. 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

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"AS WE LOOK AHEAD INTO THE NEXT CENTURY, LEADERS WILL BE THOSE WHO EMPOWER OTHERS."

— BILL GATES

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advantage of our incompetent employees.

3. 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.)
4. 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

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## JOHN TSCHOHL



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 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.