

EMPOWERMENT IS POWER IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Empowerment means that every employee must 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 so is by empowering our employees to satisfy the customer quickly and to their satisfaction.

Empowerment is the backbone of customer service. I have stated in my books and seminars that it's impossible to be a service leader and to be customer centric and focus on a service strategy without empowering our 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 adopt. I've always said that it takes two miracles to get an employee to spend \$20 of your money. Almost all employees assume that they'll 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 cost 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 rule-bending to do what they see fit if they believe it's the right thing for the customer – exactly what the employee has been conditioned against. Telling the employee to follow rules and policies is not empowerment.

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

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's what they are taught.
2. **We don't trust our employees.** We pay them as little as we can and have even less confidence in their ability to make decisions. We believe that our lying, cheating customers are going to take 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. Issues 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 out of 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 your employees on empowerment and then trust them. There are no schools anywhere that will teach them this skill. It's 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. (See www.customer-service.com/shop/programs-for-employees/empowering-employees/)

It's important to recognize, acknowledge and celebrate efforts that have created "over-happy customers." Make it a big deal, a big celebration, and the employee will be over-happy – as will the others on your team. It shows them that 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, good will and even repurchasing.

Join me in spreading the word. The success you enjoy will be from empowering your people to help other people get what they want. **RO**

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