

The need for speed

John Tschohl ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor



Never has speed been more important to your customers—and to people in general—than it is today. Technology has fueled the frenzy, putting access to information and people at our fingertips and doing so at speeds that continue to increase.

In a nutshell: We want what we want—and we want it now! We have no patience with processes—both internal and external—that move slowly. If you want your business to thrive, it's critical that you focus on speed. That means making speed a priority in every aspect of your business and removing obstacles that make speed impossible.

The first step is to analyze your policies and procedures. In most companies they are put in place to prevent customers from taking advantage of the company and to ensure that employees operate in a controlled environment.

The downside, however, is that, all too often, those policies and procedures are roadblocks to speed. They discourage employees from making quick decisions, requiring them instead to follow a lengthy—and often confusing—route to completing tasks or solving problems.

Lack of empowerment is another roadblock to speed that must be eliminated. Most employees won't make empowered decisions because they fear being reprimanded or fired if management disagrees with their actions. Speed cannot exist without empowerment, which allows for quick decisions based on knowledge and expertise. Empowered employees benefit customers, coworkers, and the company.

The third roadblock to speed is procrastination. Let's face it; many of us tend to wait until the last minute to tackle a project. If a report is due in a week, most employees will wait until the day before the deadline to start working on it. Instill in your employees the need to do things quickly. And, when they do, praise them.

Some companies, including FedEx, are successful because the folks there recognize — and cater to —

procrastinators. Many people wait until the last minute to send things, so they head to FedEx, which is only too happy to help them and take their money as they do so. That's fine for FedEx, but you don't want procrastinators on your payroll.

External barriers to speed are also a problem. If you are doing business with outside vendors who don't have the same commitment to speed that you have, fire them! Look for vendors who share your mindset and approach to speed to keep things rolling and on schedule. If your customers place an order with you but the shipping from the vendor exceeds what you expect, speed and customer satisfaction both take a hit.

Inaccuracies not only diminish quality, it slows you down because you then have to make time to fix those errors.

It's imperative that you—as an owner, executive, or manager of a company—make speed a priority in every aspect of your business. If you want to see how speed increases sales, you need only look at Amazon. When you place an order, you receive confirmation within a few seconds. When your purchase ships, Amazon notifies you and gives you an estimated date of delivery. Finally, within a minute or two of your products being delivered to you, Amazon sends you an alert.

Speed requires a special mindset, a willingness to actively look for opportunities to use speed every day and in every task and project you encounter. A speed mindset takes practice and perseverance. It must be encouraged and supported.

Of course, it's critical that you don't sacrifice accuracy when pursuing speed. Speed without accuracy is counterproductive. Inaccuracies not only diminish quality, it slows you down because you then have to make time to fix those errors.

Make speed a priority, and you will reap great rewards. Encourage speed, support it, and praise employees who practice it. 

For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit www.customer-service.com.



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