Employee empowerment may be the most underutilized tool in all of customer service.

Give employees the authority to take action. No one should have to go “higher up” to get permission to help a customer. Empower everyone to break the rules, thus allowing employees to have input and control over their work.

President Harry Truman had a sign on his desk that read “The Buck Stops Here.” Actually, that should be the line that appears under every single person’s name on their nametag or on their business cards. Customers want responsible action handled with speed and courtesy, preferably from the first person they speak with.

You must reduce the fear your employees have toward making empowered decisions.

Empowered decisions by front-line employees are much more powerful than if it comes from a manager, supervisor or the CEO. It creates more word-of-mouth advertising and more Twitter or Facebook comments. Employees who feel they have control over decisions made in the workplace tend to work harder and longer to achieve the company’s strategic goals. It allows employees to take ownership of issues and find solutions.

There are three reasons employees are not willing to use empowerment, regardless of how much the CEO wants them to. They are all based on FEAR.

1. All employees assume they will be immediately fired if they make an empowered decision.
2. They will be forced to pay for what they give away free.
3. Employees do not want to be yelled at or put down.

What do Google, Ritz Carlton, Apple and Amazon all have in common?

Yes, they’re all hugely successful companies, but it’s more about how they became so successful. They all go to great lengths to empower their employees.

Google places its employees at the heart of its business strategy, and its empowering initiatives ensure that employees:

- Feel valued and know that their opinions are valued.
- Have purpose in their work.
- Are made to feel that they own their jobs, and that the responsibility for performance is up to them.
- Take pride in their work, quality of products, and service to customers.

With an empowered workforce, your organization can reap the benefits experienced by Google.

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John Tschohl

John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by Time and Entrepreneur magazines as a customer service guru, he has written seven books on customer service. The Service Quality Institute (www.customer-service.com) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. John’s monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
"MY DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT IS GETTING AN EMPLOYEE TO MAKE
A FAST DECISION, ON THE SPOT, IN FAVOR OF THE CUSTOMER. IF THE
CUSTOMER WINS, YOUR ORGANIZATION WINS."

—JOHN TSCHOHL

- Empowered employees have the power
to make decisions without a supervisor.
They are entitled to go off script, bend
the rules, and do what they see fit if they
believe it is the right thing to do for the
customer. After all, what's the worst that
can happen? An employee gives away
too much, and now you have an overly
happy customer.
- Empowered employees take pride and
ownership in their jobs when they know
that they can exercise independent judg-
ment when necessary.

Ritz-Carlton famously empowers its
employees to spend up to $2,000 to make a
customer happy, and you'll likely never find
a Starbucks barista who's not empowered to
give you a free drink or coupon if you have a
service issue.

If you shop at an Apple store, you'll probably
find the staff personable and
engaging. They are intensively trained on
what they can do. Angela Ahrendts, Apple's
SVP of retail and online stores, believes the
key to Apple's future is not just marvelous
products, but also engaging and energizing
its nearly 100,000 employees, 60 percent of
whom now work in the $21.5 billion retail
division.

To maximize your success, take a tip from
Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.

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