

The Power of Empowerment

More and more companies are waking up to the fact that giving employees more power and responsibility can bring huge benefits for both the company and its workers. Employee empowerment may be the most underutilized tool in all of customer service. Give your staff 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 staff to have input and control over their work.



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President Harry Truman had a sign on his desk that read “The Buck Stops Here.” 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.

The Only Thing to Fear...

You must reduce the fear your employees have toward making empowered decisions. Empowered decisions by front-line employees are much more powerful than if they come 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...all based on *fear*.

1. They assume they will be immediately fired if they make an empowered decision.
2. They fear they will be forced to pay for what they give away free.
3. They are afraid of being yelled at or put down.

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“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.”

What do Google, Ritz Carlton, Apple and Amazon all have in common? Yes, they’re all hugely successful, 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.

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. Empowered employees take pride and ownership in their jobs when they know that they can exercise independent judgement 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.

To maximize your success, take a tip from Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.com, one of the world’s most customer-centric companies: “Determine what your customers need, and work backwards.” Understand what drives customer value, then figure out where empowerment can improve the quality, speed, and cost with which that value is delivered.

Great service and great products will keep those customers coming back! [TPO](#)

John Tschohl is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, MN. He just released the 10th Edition of Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service. John’s monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. customer-service.com

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