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REMOVE THE ROADBLOCKS And Let Your Empowered Employees Grow Your Business

When he talks about empowerment, John Tschohl has difficulty controlling his excitement—and his frustration. He is excited about the potential empowerment has for creating loyal customers who will drive a business—and its revenues—to great heights. He is frustrated, however, at the lack of support most employers give to empowerment.

“I can’t say enough about the importance of empowered employees in helping a business survive and grow, even in the worst of economic situations,” says the international service strategist and founder of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. “When you empower your employees to make decisions quickly to take care of your customers, the results will be amazing: increased customer loyalty, increased sales, decreased employee turnover, and word-of-mouth advertising that is less expensive and more credible than anything you could buy.”

Tschohl, whose latest book, *Empowerment: A Way of Life*, and training program will be available this fall, has been preaching the importance of empowerment to businesses throughout the world for many years. And, he says, while most executives agree that employees, particularly frontline employees who deal directly with customers on a daily basis, should be empowered to do whatever it takes to solve customers’ problems, often they are merely giving lip service to that concept.

“Most employers—and employees—actually fear empowerment,” Tschohl says. “Employers think customers will take advantage of employees, who then will ‘give away the store’ in an effort to satisfy them, while employees are afraid they will be fired if they make a decision their employees don’t agree with.”

The latter was apparent when Heidi Heise, an employee at a Subway franchise in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, gave a foot-long sandwich to two men who had been left homeless and hungry after an apartment fire. She was fired for doing so, and news of her situation spread throughout Canada, as well as to other parts of the world. That Subway franchise probably realized upwards of \$100,000 in negative publicity—all because it fired an employee for making an empowered decision to give a \$6 sandwich to two distressed men.

On the other hand, Quiznos franchisee Steve Webber, recognized in Heise the type of employee he wants to have working for him and immediately hired her. “The reaction of the Subway franchisee to an empowered employee is exactly the type of roadblock that must be removed in order to employees to make

empowered decisions,” says Tschohl. “If they fear they will be fired for doing so, none of them will ever use empowerment.”

There are several roadblocks that prevent employee empowerment—and that stagnate the growth of a business. Tschohl cites the following four roadblocks that must be removed in order to develop a truly empowered workforce:

Fear. “Employees fear they will be fired for making an empowered decision, while employers fear that customers and employees will abuse empowerment,” Tschohl says. “When you train your employees and support their decisions, you will eliminate that fear and allow your employees to be creative, yet responsible, in serving your customers.”

Distrust. “Employers must trust their employees to make decisions that will keep their customers—and their money—coming back,” Tschohl says. “And employees must be able to trust that their employers will not deride or, even worse, fire them if they make a mistake in an attempt to solve a customer’s problem.”

Micromanagement. “Nothing will kill empowerment more quickly than micromanagement,” Tschohl says. “When you micromanage your employees, you destroy their capacity for even the most basic creative thinking and problem solving. Let your employees know what you need from them, then get out of the way and let them do what you’ve asked them to do.”

Lack of recognition. “The need for recognition is universal,” Tschohl says. “Everyone needs to be told when they are doing something well, but all too often the only time employees get feedback is when they have made a mistake. The more you recognize the empowered decisions and achievements of your employees, the more likely they will be to use their creativity in dealing with situations in the future.”

Eliminate these four roadblocks, Tschohl says, and you will have an empowered team that will drive your business and crush your competition. “Empowered employees also will save your company tens of thousands of dollars over the course of a year, because customer problems will not have to progress up the chain of command in order to be solved,” he says. “When customer service decisions are made on the front line, management is freed up to address big-picture issues.”