

Remove Roadblocks

Empowered people grow business.



by John Tschohl

EMPowered employees create loyal customers who can drive revenues to great heights, even in the worst of times.

When you empower your employees to make decisions quickly to take care of customers, the results will be amazing: greater customer loyalty, more sales, less employee turnover, and *word-of-mouth advertising* that is less expensive and more credible than anything you could buy.

While most executives agree that *frontline employees who deal directly with customers should be empowered to do whatever it takes to solve customers' problems*, often they are merely giving lip service to the concept.

Most employers—and employees—actually fear empowerment. 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 employers don't agree with.

This was evident when *Heidi Heise*, an employee at a Subway franchise, gave a foot-long sandwich to two men who were homeless and hungry. She was fired. That Subway franchise suffered \$100,000 in *negative publicity*. (Quiznos franchisee Steve Webber

immediately hired Heise to work for him.)

To develop an empowered workforce, you must remove four roadblocks:

- **Fear.** Employees fear they'll be fired for making an empowered decision, while employers fear that customers and employees will abuse empowerment. When you train employees and support their decisions, you'll *eliminate that fear* and enable them to be creative, yet responsible, in serving customers.

- **Distrust.** Employers must trust their employees to make decisions that will keep their customers coming back. And employees must be able to trust that

their employers will not fire them if they make a mistake.

- **Micromanagement.** Nothing kills *empowerment* faster. You destroy their capacity for creative thinking and problem solving. Let people know *what you need from them*, then get out of the way and *let them do what you've asked of them*.

- **Lack of recognition.** Everyone *needs to be told* when they do something well, *not just when they make a mistake*. The more you recognize the empowered decisions and achievements of your employees, the more they'll use their creativity in dealing with situations.

Eliminate these roadblocks, and you'll have an empowered team that will drive business, crush competition, and save money. When service decisions are made on the front line, you are free to address big-picture issues. **SSE**



John Tschohl is a service strategist, founder of the Service Quality Institute, and author of Empowerment: A Way of Life. Email quality@servicequality.com, visit www.customer-service.com or call 952-884-3311.

ACTION: Remove roadblocks to empowerment.