

The Religion of Empowerment at Disney

I have such a passion for taking any company and introducing them to the power of delivering awesome customer service. It's the focus of every one of my books. It's my guide to delivering exemplary service to every person who walks through your doors, for your overall success in customer retention, new sales (via word of mouth), market share, financial vitality, and positive community reputation.

Have you ever heard of Disney World's reputation for exceptional customer service? Empowerment is a *religion* there. Employees are thoroughly trained and then told that they have the authority - it has been delegated to them - to do whatever is necessary to deal with problems on the spot in order to make customers happy. Their core values stack up with other great companies like Amazon... **"Customer Obsession"** or Apple... **"Insanely Great Customer Service"** or Starbucks... **"Creating a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome."**

Disney World believes that front-line employees should be the first and the last contact for customers. These employees and all Disney employees are treated with respect.

There are four roadblocks that must be removed in most companies today 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. 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 customers.

The Disney philosophy is reflected in a statement that every organization in America with a desire for customer loyalty should mount on the boardroom wall: "Management Must Not Only Support the Front Line, but It Must TRUST It As Well."

Distrust—Employers must trust their employees to make decisions that will keep their customers - and their money - coming back. Employees must be able

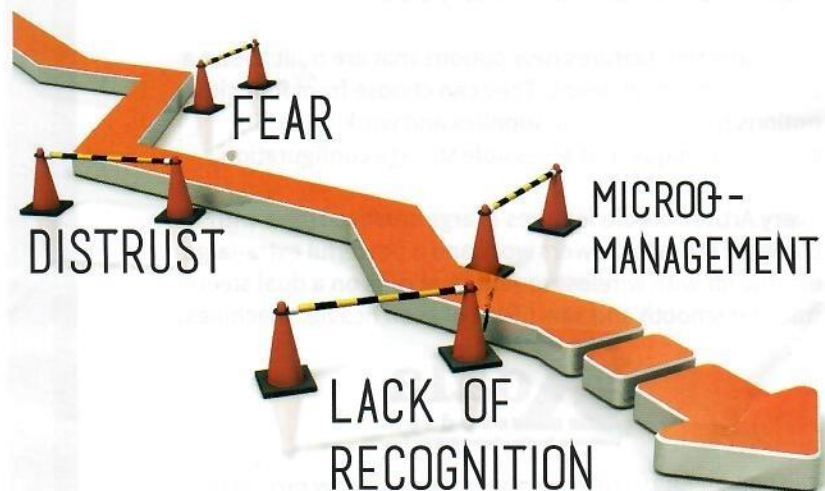
to trust that their employers will not deride or, even worse, fire them if they make a mistake in an attempt to solve a customer's problem.

Said James Poissant when he was Manager of Business Seminars at Walt Disney World, "If a supervisor notices a front-line person giving away the store, he'll usually wait and talk it over with him later." He will wait instead of intervening.

Micro-management—Nothing will kill empowerment more quickly than micro-management. 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.

When you walk up to a guest relations window at EPCOT Center, register a complaint, and ask for a return of your money, the employee at the window will more than likely act in your favor immediately and send you away happy. Management interference is discouraged.

Lack of Recognition—The need for recognition is universal. 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 *THEY* will use their creativity in dealing with situations in the future.



Cast members (as front-line employees are called) do not say, "That's not my job, I'll get a supervisor." When people with problems call a number at Disney World, the first employee who answers the phone makes an effort - a heroic effort, if necessary - to solve the problem. The employee does not send the caller all over the company.

Eliminate these four roadblocks and you'll have an empowered team that will drive your business and crush your competition.

Disney realizes great financial benefit for its commitment to quality service standards. Because clients are willing to pay for helpfulness and friendliness, for cleanliness, and for fun, Disney facilities are able to charge admissions that are about 20% higher than admission charges at any other major entertainment center in Florida or California. Stock prices are high.

About the Author:

John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. He is the President and founder of Service Quality Institute (the global leader in customer service) with operations in over 40 countries. John is a self-made millionaire traveling and speaking more than 50 times each year. He is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment, and customer service in the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.



"Empower employees to act in the customer's favor on the spot"

~John Tschohl

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