

# EMPOWERMENT...

## Your Most Valuable Tool!

*“Empower employees. After all, what’s the worst that can happen...an employee gives away too much and now you have an overly-happy customer?”*

**M**ore 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. No one should have to go “higher up” for permission to help a customer. Instead, give employees the authority to take action and empower them to make decisions when necessary without a supervisor.

When in office, President Harry Truman had a sign on his desk that read “The Buck Stops Here.” Actually, that phrase should appear on every single person’s nametag or business card. 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 coming from a manager, supervisor, or the CEO. It creates more word-of-mouth advertising and more Twitter and 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 3 reasons employees are not willing to use empowerment, regardless of how much the CEO wants them to. They are all based on **FEAR**. Employees assume:

1. 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. They will be yelled at or put down.

### EXAMPLES OF EMPOWERMENT

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

- Feel valued & know 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.



**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% 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.com**: "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. The following are three reasons to copy Amazon:

- In 2016 sales increased 27%.
- They increased revenue a whopping \$29 billion (from \$107 billion to \$136 billion).
- Jeff Bezos increased his net worth to \$72.8 billion. He is now the 3rd wealthiest person in the world.

Empowered employees take pride and ownership in their jobs when they know they can exercise independent judgement as necessary. They are entitled to go off script, bend the rules, and do what they see fit if they believe it's the right thing 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?

With an empowered workforce, your organization can reap the same type of benefits experienced by some of the world's most successful companies.

**About the Author:** 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 7 books on customer service. The Service Quality Institute (<http://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.



# VDTA NEWS

VACUUM DEALERS TRADE ASSOCIATION

The trade publication for the independent retailer

September 2017 | ISSUE 432 [www.vdta.com](http://www.vdta.com)

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