

CULTURE POWER

"I want to speak to a Supervisor!" (Part 2 of 2)

By Ron Kaufman

Last month I wrote:

"Companies should empower and support Frontline Staff to do what the Supervisor ultimately does, without having to check with the Supervisor each and every time. This means Staff must get enough training to KNOW what's right - and have enough authority to DO what's right."

Many readers sent in follow-up questions and suggestions.

Question:

"If we do empower staff, how can we measure if it is properly utilized?"

Answer:

You should measure utilization of empowerment only by counting returning customer visits, or resulting customer compliments. If your high-value customers come back, make new purchases or praise your service, then your staff empowerment policy is effective.

However, if high-value customers do not praise and come back, or if only low-value customers are happy and returning, then you need to change your staff empowerment formula.

Here's a hint: Contact some of your high-value customers who did NOT return. Ask them WHY they didn't come back - and what your staff should have done to earn their repeat visit. Listen carefully. Your former customers will tell you exactly what to do.

And here's an added bonus: Just asking "non-returning customers" what it would take to get them back - will often get them back!

Sometimes it's not money, refunds and discounts that count, but your time and personal attention.

Question:

How do we know where to put limits so the liabilities of additional cost are minimized?"

Answer:

To limit your liabilities, put a simple cap on expenditures allowed (without supervisor approval). Be sure to link the financial cap to actual client value. Small clients, small cap.

Big clients with big budgets, larger amounts allowed. Test this over time to get the right mix of flexibility and generosity by tracking your client's reaction.

Remember, the ultimate decision maker is whether good clients return and how much they are worth to your business in repeat purchases and referrals. As long as they come back, buy more and refer others, your expense is not a liability, it's a smart investment.

Question:

If the frontline staff is not actually your staff, but belong to an authorized distributor or service center (independent entities), can we apply the same principle?

Answer:

Yes! I believe the SAME principle can apply and even become the foundation for stronger collaboration between you and your authorized "Service Partners". When you show trust by allowing distributors and licensees to make real decisions with real dollars for real customers, they will feel your appreciation and respect. That can make your company stand out from all the other companies whose products they distribute. That can lead to active recommendations and positive word of mouth for you. A real win-win. So do it!

Comment:

Brilliant Ron!! Impeccable timing. After many a meeting to discuss our service levels, we came to a stand-still. Supervisors & managers alike continued to insist they were doing all they could with the frontline staff we have. Every time the front-liners have an issue I have to come to the rescue.

We knuckled down to a solution. An "empowerment pad" was our answer. Each staff member carries one of these pads & when they see or hear of an issue in our hotel they note down the problem, quickly solve the problem & then pass on the docket for future consultation.

We provided solutions to all the issues we could think of and told the frontliners to seek & destroy all of our issues.

The staff are visibly more vibrant & actually do not fear the situations they get into with our clients, they are looking for potential problems & pre-empting the solution. The supervisors are relaxed & they are now encouraging & motivating like never before.

I have read out your email to all my staff. Thank you for a perfectly timed chapter in customer service. Our organization is moving upward, it is very exhilarating.

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