

## Empowering Employees To Be Mini-Marketers

### *Encourage Your Employees To Be Walking Billboards For Their Company*

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Regardless of your company's marketing campaign, your employees are walking billboards for your business twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. As a result of their direct or indirect words and actions, your company will receive either good, bad, or neutral press depending on whether your employees are satisfied in the organization and feel a part of the company's mission. The key to eliminating the bad and neutral press and harnessing the positive press is to empower your employees so they're mini-marketers for your organization, whether they realize it or not.

When you empower your employees you give them the message that their contribution is important. And that feeling of being a part of something larger than themselves motivates all people. As a result, the degree to which people can identify their contribution to the organization is the degree to which they'll speak and act positively about the company. That's why you want to empower your people to make decisions, to take action, and to embrace a unified entrepreneurial spirit that allows the company to shine.

#### **What is Empowerment?**

Empowerment is more than simply telling people what they can and cannot do. Empowerment is a three-fold process that builds trust between the employees and the corporation. First, when employees are empowered, they know precisely how much latitude they have in

any given situation. They don't have to second-guess themselves when they make decisions because managers have detailed what each person can do.

Second, when empowered employees have reached the limit of their authority, they know the steps to take to find out additional information or to make suggestions. Finally, empowered employees are not afraid to think outside the box or offer ideas because they know they have management's support and that the senior executives want their input. They feel that the company values their ideas and they strive to devise new ways to help the organization perform better.

No matter how your company is currently organized, you can attain this three-fold level of empowerment. When you do, the rewards will show not only in an increase of positive press, but also in the bottom line as your customers and shareholders notice the difference.

#### **Initiate a Culture Change**

Simply telling employees that they are empowered is not enough. Empowerment is a culture change you need to instill. In most companies, employees expect managers to tell them what to do in every situation. However, deep in their hearts, employees want more responsibility and want to make a meaningful contribution. They want to play a vital role, but experience, management, and colleagues have taught

them that to be “good employees,” they need to do what they’re told. In reality, companies today don’t want mini-puppets who do what they’ve been told. They want employees who are entrepreneurially minded and who feel as though they have a stake in the organization’s success.

Such a transition and culture change requires that management stop making decisions for people. Rather than tell people what to do, turn it into a questioning style of management. Ask employees what they think they should do in a situation and then listen to their answers. If their answers aren’t well thought out, ask them more detailed questions to prompt further thinking. Whatever you do, don’t jump in with the solution. Instead, make it a safe environment where employees can think through their options and come to their own decisions.

For example, if you’re uncertain what to price a new product, ask your employees for their input. After all, they are the ones on the front line who interact with customers, so they have valuable insights you can’t get from the executive suite. If their initial responses to your question don’t make sense, ask them to think in the context of different scenarios, such as “What if the customer buys in bulk?” or “What if the customer wants a trial period?” As they refine their initial ideas, be open to what they say. In as many situations as possible, use their input towards the final decision. Such a process may take longer up front, but in the end it will create time for the managers as the employees take over more and more of the decision process.

## **Listening is Key**

In any business interaction, customers tell the company’s employees what they want and need. In order for employees to relay that information to management, they need to feel that they’ll be listened to and taken seriously. This is important, because based on the customer feedback your employees offer, you may discover an untapped niche, a new product idea, or a better service offering than your competition currently has.

When you don’t listen to your employees or when you discount their input as unimportant, you squash their motivation and foster a team of stagnate, negative employees. That’s not an environment conducive to creating mini-marketers. However, when you listen and respond to feedback, you help your employees be in a state of SharedKnowledge™, where they have the information, skills and motivation that contribute to the company’s vision and strategic plan. So being customer focused is no longer enough to gain market share; you need to be employee focused as well and listen to your employees as you would the customers.

## **Empowerment in Action**

You’ll know your team is empowered when their daily actions and words put the organization in a positive light. An example of an empowered employee is the receptionist at the Raleigh, North Carolina Chamber of Commerce who researched the answer to a visitor’s question and then e-mailed him the answer the following day. She could have simply responded to his question with an “I don’t know,” but her organization empowered her to go beyond the customary information sources.

In a grocery store, an empowered employee hears the customers' requests for a particular product and tells the manager, who in turn asks the regional buyer to order that product for the store. Without such a responsive manager, who listens to employees and acts on their suggestions, the employee would keep such feedback to herself, resulting in lost product sales for the store.

In a restaurant, an empowered waitress listens to a customer's complaint about the establishment's temperature and her request to turn up the heat. The waitress explains that the temperature controls are kept under a locked box and that she does not have the key. Rather than tell the customer there is nothing she can do, the waitress talks to the manager on duty and attempts to work out a solution. She communicates her findings to the customer, both the good news and the bad news about the temperature, and the

customer ultimately leaves the restaurant happy and satisfied that the waitress listened to and acted on her concerns.

In each of these examples, the empowered employees gave the company positive press without even knowing it. They became more than just a receptionist, a clerk, and a waitress; they became mini-marketers whose actions spoke louder than their words and earned the company repeat business and higher profits.

### **Empower Your Employees Today**

As you strive to empower your workforce, take the time to detail the latitude each person has, the processes in which to channel new ideas, and ways for managers to show their support. The more empowered your employees are, the greater rewards your company will reap in terms of positive press, increased sales, and higher bottom-line results.

#### About the Author:

Linda Keefe is a speaker, consultant and CEO of Shared Results International, a business focused on helping companies achieve faster growth and higher productivity.

Shared Results International provides solutions to companies that allow them to overcome organizational indifference, communication problems and technological skill deficiencies that affect their bottom line.

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