

SUPERIOR SERVICE



Developing a High-Powered Front Line

Strong employees thrive in a supportive culture. Here's how to take empowerment from buzzword to reality.

By Bob Furniss, *Touchpoint Associates*

Do you have an empowered culture?

Are you willing to allow your employees to make decisions based on what is best for the company, the employee and the customer?

Wikipedia says that empowerment refers to increasing the strength of individuals. Empowered people are willing to make decisions based on the best information available — without the fear of retribution. They don't just whine about something that is not quite right; they actually make recommendations for how to implement change — change that benefits the company, the employee or the customer — and sometimes all three.

It is important that you have a plan when communicating with each group of employees. (See below for tips to improve your communication with your staff.)

Communicate to Empower

Effective communication is critical to creating an empowered culture. Following are seven communications tips to support your front line.

1. BE A BETTER LISTENER.

Pay attention to your employees. Frontline managers have one of the toughest jobs in the center, but the most important responsibility is the communication with their team.

2. MAKE TIME FOR EMPLOYEES.

Regular, one-on-one meetings with team members are important. If you can't do it weekly, make sure it happens at least once a month. Talk about their career paths and how to attain their goals — both personal and work-related. Dedicate time each day to walking the center floor and being available. It's a hands-on approach that demonstrates to your staff that you're accessible.

3. Communicate at the right time. It's not what you say but when you say it. With our busy schedules, it's easy to forget to tell someone, on a timely basis, something that they should know about their specific job or their communications with customers. A failure in this area can breed discontent and fear throughout the center.

4. SHARE A CONSISTENT MESSAGE ABOUT YOUR VALUES.

In a time when the integrity of business leaders is often called into question, it is important that you explain your values and your expectations to your team. It's also critical to talk often about the most important asset of any company — the employees. When was the last time you told your team (or individual team members) how important they are to the success of the company?

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5. GIVE REGULAR FEEDBACK; AVOID SURPRISES.

Feedback (good or bad) should occur as close as possible to the occurrence of an event. Agents should never learn about significant performance issues for the first time in an annual evaluation. Consistent and timely coaching is the essence of effective communication on a personal level.

6. BE PREPARED WHEN SPEAKING TO GROUPS.

It is very important that you have an agenda when you are speaking at a team meeting or "huddle." We recommend that managers use the following categories for most meetings:

Information. Have a clear plan of what you want to say and include the "why" or WIIFM (what's in it for me) for the agents.


Include. Seek feedback from agents in every meeting.

Involve. Seek opportunities to involve agents in the meeting — allow them to lead meetings when possible.

Inspire. Find a reason to recognize the success of one person or the

entire group in every meeting.

7. DON'T HIDE BEHIND EMAIL.

Delicate matters should be discussed in person. Most conflicts should be settled face to face, or at least by phone. When emotions are involved, email is the least appropriate way to communicate. 

To read the entire article, visit:

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