

Club Resources
INTERNATIONAL

Making
Employee Empowerment
a reality at your club

Author: Ed Rehkopf

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INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment became a corporate buzzword in the Nineties and the consensus in the business press was that it was a good thing. Many companies claimed to empower their employees, but claiming to do so and actually doing it are two very different matters.

Instead of the traditional view that employees are easily replaceable elements in an organization, people who must be trained to do narrow, well-defined tasks and who must be closely watched and supervised at all times, the concept of empowerment says that today's more educated and sometimes more sophisticated employees need and want to contribute more to their employer and workplace. Yet many businesses marginalize their employees by refusing to listen to them and by failing to let them contribute to the enterprise in any meaningful way.

A few companies have truly embraced the concept of empowerment and have discovered the immense power and synergy that can be unleashed when employees participate more fully in their operations. Any employee at a Ritz-Carlton hotel can spend up to \$2,000 a day per guest to solve problems and not just satisfy their guests, but to wow them with "legendary" service.

Further, highly successful companies who engage their employees in developing work processes and continual process improvement have discovered that these empowered employees make indispensable partners in delivering service. Not only do they have a greater stake in the enterprise and are more fully committed to and responsible for their work, they actually equate their purpose and success with that of their company.

Motivation and morale in such companies is sky-high without gimmicks or periodic campaigns by management. These employees are energized by their involvement and sense of contribution. Again, we point to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, whose employees are passionate about their service to guests and fellow employees and whose loyalty to their employer is as legendary as their service.

Yet it takes more than telling employees they can spend money to solve problems to reap the benefits of employee empowerment. Establishing a culture of empowerment requires the necessary leadership and culture to nourish and sustain it.

Managers must also be secure enough in their positions and knowledge to be open to employee ideas, while employees must understand the framework and guidelines of their empowerment. Within defined limits, employees must be free to use their creativity and ingenuity to improvise and solve member problems – the extent of which management can never fully anticipate nor create sufficient contingency instructions.

“Without empowerment, an organization will never be a service leader. Empowerment is the most critical skill an employee can master and a company can drive in order to lure and keep customers.”

John Tschohl

What is Employee Empowerment?

So what are empowered employees and how can they help your club meet its Mission and Vision? In the simplest terms empowered employees are viewed as full-fledged partners in your quest for high levels of quality and service. They are encouraged to think, act, and make decisions on their own based on guidelines defined by the club.

The major role that a club makes in empowering its employees is to create a culture where employees are valued and recognized as indispensable partners in the enterprise. It must also understand that to be successful with employee empowerment, employees must **fully sense** the club's commitment to such empowerment; simply saying that employees are empowered, does not make it so. The club's leaders at all levels must do more than talk the talk.

Leaders must understand that empowerment is not something bestowed on employees like some magical gift given by management to the workers. The leaders' role is to establish both the environment and atmosphere where employees feel their empowerment and are emboldened to make decisions, knowing they have the support and backing of their leaders. While the leaders must clearly lay out for employees the extent of their authority to act and make decisions, the **sense of empowerment** comes from the employees.

While employee empowerment may be seen as a desirable practice by management, it ultimately can come about **only with the recognition by employees** that they are empowered. This means that the focus of leaders must not be on what employees are doing to achieve empowerment, but on what they themselves are doing to promote and enable it.

Note: I have used an article by Susan M. Heathfield, a management consultant, entitled Top 10 Principles of Employee Empowerment, as the basic outline for this handbook; and quoted from this article at the beginning of each section.

I – VALUE YOUR PEOPLE

“Your regard for people shines through in all of your actions and words. Your facial expression, your body language, and your words express what you are thinking about the people who report to you. Your goal is to demonstrate your appreciation for each person's unique value. No matter how an employee is performing on their current task, your value for the employee as a human being should never falter and always be visible.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that their people are valued by stressing empowerment in their Club Values and Culture. Additional guidance can be found in the concept of Service-based Leadership as discussed in *Leadership on the Line, a Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners, and Emerging Leaders*.

“We acknowledge each operation as a team of dedicated individuals working toward common goals and we recognize the ultimate value of people in everything we do.”

Operating Standards

“While I may direct employees’ work, their productive effort and well-being serve the interests of the client or club who employs them. Therefore, I must work hard to ensure their maximum contribution to the mission and goals of the Company and club. I can only do this if I value each employee as an individual whose contribution to the collective effort is directly dependent upon my leadership, as well as the tools, training, resources, and support I provide them.”

Managers’ Code of Ethics

“All employees will be treated with dignity and respect.”

Principles of Employee Relations

“As a group of people committed to common goals, you can only achieve your team’s greatest potential by taking advantage of the talent, initiative, and ingenuity of each and every one of your employees. To the extent that any individual is not valued, trained, and motivated, your enterprise suffers.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 50

“People matter! And true leaders understand this.

Leadership on the Line, p. 171

Valuing Your People

What things can a leader do to demonstrate your regard for people “in all your actions and words”?

1. **Know and use their names.** Everyone likes to be recognized as an individual and be called by name. Certainly your members do, and your employees do as well. Introduce them to members, guests, and visitors, when appropriate. Failing to do so implies they’re just part of the scenery instead of key contributors to the success of your club.

2. **Learn about them as individuals.** Get to know them, their life situation, their dreams and plans, their goals in life. This does not mean you are to become their friends, but it does mean you have enough interest in them as individuals to try to understand their situation, their needs, and motivations.
3. **Greet them daily.** You should never fail to greet employees when you see them each day. You don't like to be ignored as if you were unimportant, and neither do they.
4. **Share your time with them.** As busy as you are, make time for your employees. They have questions, concerns, and needs that should never be ignored. Be open and approachable. When you are not, when they are afraid to come to you for fear of your reaction, you are kept in the dark about what is really going on in your team. If any employee is monopolizing your time or is a "high maintenance" employee, do not be shy about letting him know the inappropriateness of his behavior.
5. **Recognize each as an individual.** None of us is the perfect employee, manager, server, cart attendant, etc. Don't expect your employees to be. Learn each person's strengths and weakness. Capitalize on the strengths and help each person overcome their weaknesses. The time you invest in helping an employee develop his or her skills and abilities is well worth the effort and will be appreciated far more than you'll ever realize.
6. **Be involved in the workplace and work processes.** Do not create a hostile work environment by failing to adequately communicate with your employees. Without your ongoing guidance and direction, petty dissensions and friction will grow among the workers of your team as they struggle to figure out what they must do and who must do what.
7. **Look out for their welfare.** Make sure your employees get adequate work breaks, that their workspaces are set up for comfort and efficiency, that they are properly trained and equipped for their jobs, that you adjust work schedules when possible to meet individual needs, that you resolve pay discrepancies quickly, that you get back to them to resolve issues they've raised. Make sure they understand their benefits, taking the time to explain the details to them. Encourage them to participate in the club's 401(k) Retirement Plan, showing how even small contributions can build up over time.
8. **Treat them as adults.** When you treat employees like children, they will act like children. Don't talk down to them or treat them like they're stupid. When you give people responsibility, most will reward your trust. Those who demonstrate they can't be trusted should be encouraged to move on.
9. **Show them respect.** This is critically important in the way you speak to them, the tone of your voice, your choice of words, and your body language. Your respect for them cannot be faked. You must sincerely value people to treat them with respect at all times.
10. **Do not take advantage of them.** Employees are not your servants and should not be expected to perform personal services for you. If you delegate tasks, make sure there is value in it for them, either in enhanced compensation or a genuine learning opportunity.
11. **Thank them often.** How easy is it to say, "Thank you"? It cost nothing and it reaps great rewards. The only requirement is that it must be sincerely given.
12. **Say goodbye at the end of the day or shift.** A farewell is a common courtesy that you would extend to family and friends, if for no other reason than as an acknowledgement of departure. The members of your work team, who you depend upon for your success, should receive no less of a courtesy. Again, the need for sincerity is absolute.

II – SHARE YOUR VISION

“Help people feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves and their individual job. Do this by making sure they know and have access to the organization's overall mission, vision, and strategic plans.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that leaders share their vision through statements in their Club Values and Culture. Additional guidance can be found in the concept of Service-based Leadership as discussed in *Leadership on the Line*.

“Our vision and goals are articulated.”

Operating Standards

“Explain the ‘big picture’ to your employees. They need to understand how their efforts contribute to the larger goals of the company.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 49

“Every day you talk to one or more of your employees. Use these conversations to paint the vision, explain the big picture, and connect the small daily task to the larger goal.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 55

“As a leader you must have a vision of what you are trying to achieve with your operation. If you have no vision of what you want your operation to be, how it is to function, or what quality of work your employees will produce, you are merely maintaining the status quo and are providing little value to your company.

“Vision is useless if not shared. Talk about it day in and day out. Vision should be so ingrained in the work lives of your employees that it is constantly on their minds. When it is, all of their abilities and efforts are directed by and toward it.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 63

“Moving large and complex organizations in a particular direction requires the ability to formulate and articulate a vision of what the organization should be. ‘Selling’ the vision requires constant hammering home of easy-to-grasp themes. Without the ‘big picture’ sense of direction, employees become lost in the day-to-day detail and monotony of their jobs. Leaders must engage with employees on all levels and view such interaction as an opportunity to ‘spread the gospel.’”

Leadership on the Line, p. 117

What is Vision and How Do You Create It?

According to the Business Dictionary, vision is an *“aspirational description of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future. It is intended to serves as a clear guide for choosing current and future courses of action.”*

A good example of a vision statement is that of Southwest Airlines. Herb Kellerher, the company's CEO, spells out how he envisions his company with the simple statement – “We are THE low-fare airline” – which is meant to guide every decision the company makes at every level. The clear focus is on holding down costs to be the low-fare airline.

Simply put, a vision statement is a description of how you envision your club, department, or section to perform and the quality of your products and service.

You can create the vision for your team by thinking clearly about what you are trying to accomplish. Some things that come readily to mind in our business are high levels and standards of personalized service, value, quality, friendliness, courtesy, and exceeding member expectations.

How Best to Share Your Vision

As mentioned in *Leadership on the Line*, vision is useless if not shared. There are a number of things you should do to share your vision:

1. **Write it down.** Take some time to clearly think through your vision. What is it exactly that you want your team to do and how do you want them to do it. Don't expect to write a great vision statement in a few minutes. You may need to write it out, let it sit for awhile, and then come back to it again at a later time. In some cases, writing an effective vision statement will take a number of iterations until you've captured the essence of what it is you are trying to do. Share it with other managers for their input and feedback. Often a fresh set of eyes will see something obvious that you've missed because you're so close to it.
2. **Format it for its end use.** Think how you intend to use your vision statement. How will you present it to your team and what format(s) would work best? There are a number ways to do this – pocket cards, posters prominently displayed in work areas, envelope stuffers with paychecks, discussions at team meetings, or any creative way you can think of to get your employees to focus on, discuss, and understand exactly what it is your group is trying to accomplish.
3. **Put it in place.** Once you've got it written and formatted in all the ways you intend to use it, put it out there. Post your posters, hold your discussion groups, stuff employees' pay envelopes. This is not a one time task. Your staff has to know that this is not some fad or initiative *du jour* that will go away because you'll lose interest. Your vision is critically important to the development and success of your team. You will need patience and persistence – the will to make it happen – to make it a part of your team's culture. As new employees come into your team, they too must understand the vision. Hopefully, if your work team has bought in to the vision, their words and example will be the most effective means of indoctrinating new team members.
4. **Refer to it.** Talk about it constantly, continually, all the time, without fail – until your employees can recite it in their sleep. What is seen as important to you will be important to your employees. Never miss an opportunity to reinforce your vision.
5. **Connect to it.** Make sure your employees know how their daily tasks contribute to the larger vision. It's too easy for employees to get lost in the day-to-day routine of their jobs. When they do this, they lose focus. When they lose focus, they will not be contributing to the accomplishment of the vision.
6. **Modify it as necessary.** No organization is static. Everything changes over time. Periodically review your vision to ensure it is still valid. Modify or tweak it as necessary to keep it current and relevant.

III – SHARE YOUR GOALS

“Share the most important goals and direction for your group. Where possible, either make progress on goals measurable and observable, or ascertain that you have shared your picture of a positive outcome with the people responsible for accomplishing the results.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that leaders share their goals by making such sharing part of their Club Values and Culture. Additional guidance can be found in the concept of Service-based Leadership as discussed in *Leadership on the Line*.

“Our vision and goals are articulated.”

Operating Standard

“Employees have no idea what goals management has for them unless those goals are communicated.”

“Management must make every practical effort to keep employees informed on matters concerning policy, procedures, long range plans, projects, (and) work conditions.”

Principles of Employee Relations

“As a leader you possess a great deal of information about the company. You attend meetings where goals, problems, projects, and other operational details are discussed. Much of this information should be communicated to employees. Seldom is there a reason to keep them in the dark.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 54

“Have goals for your service team. While each leader often operates from goals that are unstated, it is far better to share them with employees. This way, every employee can assist in working toward goals.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 63

Sharing Your Goals

As in sharing your vision, there are a number of steps necessary to share your goals:

1. **Write them down.** Create a plan for your club, department, or section. The plan should be a list of those things you want to accomplish in the coming year. They can be anything from buying a piece of equipment, to improving the training of your employees, to creating a new revenue opportunity, to reducing overtime, to implementing employee empowerment. The key thing is to write your plan down. By putting it in writing, you formally commit to its accomplishment. It’s also helpful to break down goals into the steps necessary to achieve them and establish a timeline for completing each step.
2. **Share your goals.** Sharing the goals helps your staff understand that you plan to improve the operation, what steps will be taken, what the priorities are, what they will be asked to do, and the timing of each task to meet the goals of the plan. In understanding the plan they will be better able to assist in meeting the goals.

3. **Seek employees' input.** Since your goals will affect your employees, they are often in the best position to provide meaningful input as to how to implement your plans. They work closest with the members and can suggest what works and doesn't. Don't hesitate to listen to them and incorporate their ideas into the plan, even to the extent of modifying the plan and priorities to take advantage of their ideas. Make sure you give them credit for their ideas. The more they see you valuing their input, the more likely they will buy in to the plan and put their efforts into accomplishing it.
4. **Seek employees' assistance and commitment.** You may need to "sell" some of your goals to your team. Share with them your reasoning for making the planned improvements. Usually, improvements in the operation have some benefit for them as well, such as greater efficiency in the operation, improved training, better work relationships and interactions with members, and improved morale. To the extent that it becomes their plan, the more likely they will get behind it.
5. **Implement the plan.** Once you've announced the plan, shared the goals with your team, and won their support, you must follow through to completion. Nothing will discourage your team more than a plan that goes nowhere. If this happens, you'll probably never get their support again. Make sure you keep the plan moving forward and on track to timely completion of all goals. If, for some reason, you have to postpone any goal, make sure you explain the reasons to your team.
6. **Provide ongoing feedback.** Be sure your team is fully aware of progress, particularly if the progress is not observable or self-evident. Use time at your staff meetings to bring everyone up to date on what is happening. Even if the news is not all positive, if there have been setbacks and delays, share that information too. The more they know, the better able they are to support you and the plan.
7. **Recognize contribution.** Make a big deal out of each employee's contribution to the effort. Such recognition rewards behaviors that contribute and makes employees even more willing to work hard toward accomplishing the team's goals.

IV – TRUST YOUR PEOPLE

“Trust the intentions of people to do the right thing, make the right decision, and make choices that, while maybe not exactly what you would decide, still work.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that their Values and Culture stress the importance of trusting employees. Additional guidance can be found in *Leadership on the Line*.

“The great majority of people want to do their jobs well and they take pride in their work. When an employee fails, it is often a failure of management to properly train or communicate performance expectations.”

Principles of Employee Relations

“Poor morale is solved by a genuine interest in the welfare of employees, trust, constant feedback, good two-way communications, clear goals, and positive motivation.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 60

“. . . while every person is an individual, unique in background, experience, and education, the great majority have a common set of needs as they negotiate their worlds: . . . they prefer to trust and be trusted.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 169

Trusting Your People

Valuing your people and sharing your vision and goals with them will go a long way toward demonstrating your trust in them. Some additional steps will also help:

1. **Communicating frequently and thoroughly.** Anxiety and fear breed in an atmosphere of silence and secrecy. The more frequently and better you communicate with your staff, the more you will alleviate any concerns and build a sense of trust.
2. **Believe in them.** Your belief in them, their work, and their contribution must be rock solid. You can't fake this confidence, no matter what else you may say and do.
3. **Expect the best.** Set high standards and trust that your staff can meet them. Don't expect the worst from your people or they may try to meet that expectation.
4. **Deal with problem individuals individually.** If you have problem employees, individuals you don't or can't trust based upon their behavior, act quickly and decisively to rehabilitate or remove them. Don't deal with these individual problems as group problems. When you do, you demonstrate your lack of trust in the rest of your team.

5. **Don't micromanage or second-guess.** Demonstrate your trust by allowing latitude of action within the guidelines of empowerment. If errors are made, deal with them constructively. Never punish employees who have, in good faith, exercised the authority you have given. Often such errors will reveal instances where your guidance was unclear or limits of authority were uncertain.

While your empowered employees must know that you trust them, this does not mean that you can be lax about properly securing inventories and assets, or other security-related matters. Your empowered employees will recognize that high levels of security are a sign of a professionally run and efficient operation and not a reflection of your attitudes toward them.

V – PROVIDE GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION FOR EMPOWERED BEHAVIOR

“Make certain that you have given people, or made sure that they have access to, all of the information they need to make thoughtful decisions.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that leaders provide guidelines and information for empowered behavior as discussed in *Leadership on the Line*.

“. . . in addition to showing them what to do, you need to explain in depth the reasons behind various duties. If they are to grow into broader responsibilities, they will need to have knowledge, not just technical experience.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 53

“When leaders become absorbed in their own sense of urgency about plans, projects, and priorities, it is easy to forget that employees lack this valuable information. To foster this same sense of urgency in employees, communicate the details of such planning when appropriate.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 54

Providing Information

Having developed the necessary environment for empowerment by valuing and trusting employees, while communicating values and goals to them, the leader’s next step is to establish the framework for empowered action.

With the understanding that most hospitality employees have never experienced working in an empowered organization, the leader must plant the seeds of empowerment by suggesting ways in which employees can act in empowered ways.

1. **Develop a list of most frequent member complaints or issues.** By enlisting your employees’ help in identifying problem areas or issues, you send a strong message to them that you value their opinions and input. This is the first step in helping them realize that they can be empowered to solve the problems.
2. **Brainstorm empowerment opportunities.** Once your team has identified problem areas, brainstorm with them how these problems might be properly resolved. In the give and take discussion while brainstorming, your team will gain a deeper insights of how and why problems should be resolved in particular ways and what might be the best resolution of a particular issue.
3. **Establish standards or limits of empowerment.** As the leader, you should guide the discussion to the appropriate solutions. Ultimately, while employees may make decisions and take empowered action, it is up to you to ensure that they take the appropriate action and understand the guidelines of their authority. In other words, you’re responsible for establishing the standards and limits of their empowerment.
4. **Challenge your team to work on one or two of the identified problem areas.** Select the most pressing of the identified problem areas or those that represent easy-to-fix issues; then challenge your team to make decisions on their own and take action to resolve them. Make sure they understand that they will not be

punished for doing the wrong thing and that any errors will only be used as learning opportunities for everyone involved.

5. **Set up a schedule of ongoing meetings.** Meetings every week or so are opportunities to review how the team is doing, what problems they've encountered, how they might resolve such problems, and to encourage the team toward further empowerment.

For an example of guidelines for empowering employees, see Appendix A.

VI – PROVIDE FREQUENT FEEDBACK

“Provide frequent feedback so that people know how they are doing. Sometimes, the purpose of feedback is reward and recognition. People deserve your constructive feedback, too, so they can continue to develop their knowledge and skills.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that leaders provide frequent feedback by making such feedback part of their Club Values and Culture. Additional guidance can be found in *Leadership on the Line*.

“(Employees) have a need and the right to know how their performance is contributing to the achievement of . . . goals. Continuous feedback is essential.”

“Recognition is important to all of us. If we have the authority to correct, we also have the responsibility to praise. We cannot have one without the other.”

Principles of Employee Relations

“Unless you make a concerted effort to provide employees proper direction, feedback, and ongoing growth opportunities, delegating may alienate them. In other words, don’t use them. You need to put effort into their growth and make it worthwhile for them as well as for you.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 53

“There are seldom opportunities for dramatic heroism in most businesses. However, there are the daily, dedicated efforts of employees faced with monotonous routine, difficult situations inherent in customer service, and detail, detail, detail. Employees should be recognized for the quiet, unprepossessing heroism that this involves. Simply put, do not forget to thank your employees for the good things they do every day – it probably outweighs the bad 50 to 1.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 59

“Once goals have been established, constantly reiterate them and provide feedback to employees regarding their efforts to achieve them. Most people want to participate in a larger effort and know how their daily efforts are contributing.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 64

Providing Feedback

When you turn your empowered employees loose to make their contribution to the team’s goals, you must continually monitor what they are doing and provide meaningful feedback so they know how they’re doing.

Like a sailor continually monitoring the sea and wind while trimming his sails and adjusting the rudder to most efficiently sail a course, the leader must monitor the team’s efforts and tell them what they are doing right and how they might improve performance. This frequent feedback accomplishes two important things:

1. **It validates and reinforces** what the team is doing right, and

2. **It modifies and enhances** those things that could be improved.

The bottom line is that feedback will give them confidence in what they are doing and this confidence will promote even more empowered behaviors.

VII – FOCUS ON PROBLEM SOLUTION; NOT PLACING BLAME

“When a problem occurs, ask what is wrong with the work system that caused the people to fail, not what is wrong with the people. (What is the) worst case response to problems? Seek(ing) to identify and punish the guilty.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Club Values and Culture need to speak to the importance of focusing on problem solution and not placing blame. Additional guidance can be found in the concept of Service-based Leadership as discussed in *Leadership on the Line*.

“The great majority of people want to do their jobs well and they take pride in their work. When an employee fails, it is often a failure of management to properly train or communicate performance expectations.”

Principles of Employee Relations

“This outward focus of the leader sets up a dynamic where: Problem discovery and solution is a focus while placing blame is unimportant.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 26

Focus on Problem Solution

Given the detail- and labor-intensive nature of club operations, there are more problems to deal with every day than can possibly be addressed by management. But when problems are not addressed, the sheer volume of issues can cripple an organization. It is essential, therefore, that managers at all levels of a club have a bias toward action and a focus on problem solution. The number of ongoing and emerging issues points directly and emphatically to the need for and benefits of empowering your employees to assist you in your efforts. The more they can do to help, the more time you have for other matters.

Therefore, a large part of fostering an empowered workforce is to place a positive emphasis on problem discovery and solution. When your employees see you working hard to overcome obstacles, to enhancing efficiencies, and resolving issues that they confront daily, they will be more willing to pitch in and help.

Don't Place Blame

The recognition by employees that they won't be singled out for blame or punishment for honest mistakes in furthering the club's interests is absolutely critical to creating an atmosphere where employee empowerment flourishes.

Without a blame-free workplace, where the only desire is to work through and solve problems, employees will hesitate to act for fear of making mistakes and being embarrassed or punished. If you want your employees' help and want to receive the many benefits of their willing and enthusiastic contributions, you can't turn around and berate or belittle them for mistakes they might make. Nothing will shut empowerment down quicker than finding fault or placing blame.

Instead you must learn to recognize error as error and use such opportunities to further educate the individual and your team. A supportive, constructive environment is the best way to show you're serious about improvement and wanting to enlist their help and participation.

VIII – RECOGNIZE AND REWARD EMPOWERED BEHAVIOR

“When employees feel under-compensated, under-titled for the responsibilities they take on, under-noticed, under-praised, and under-appreciated, don’t expect results from employee empowerment. The basic needs of employees must feel met for employees to give you their discretionary energy, that extra effort that people voluntarily invest in work.”

Susan M. Heathfield

Guidance to Leaders

Clubs need to ensure that employees are recognized and rewarded for their empowered behavior. Such recognition is a basic requirement of Service-based Leadership as discussed in *Leadership on the Line*.

“Recognize employees for their successes. You have the authority to correct, so you must also accept the responsibility to praise and reward.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 47

“Say thank you to your employees on a regular basis. Nothing could be simpler or more profound in its impact on staff morale because so few managers do it.

“‘Thanks for your help today,’ ‘I really appreciate your efforts on this project,’ ‘I realize how difficult this assignment was, and am most appreciative of your help,’ ‘I couldn’t have done it without you,’ ‘You did a great job.’ – any of these expressions of appreciation, when sincerely given, will have a stunning impact on your service team.”

Leadership on the Line, p. 107

Recognizing People

During his tenure in office, former New York City mayor Ed Koch continually asked the people of NYC through the media, “How’m I doing?” Even at the peak of his career and power, the mayor of, arguably, the most important city on earth still needed ongoing validation of his efforts. This need for positive feedback is near universal in humankind. You need it, we need it, and they – your employees – need it too!

Consider that positive feedback accomplishes three very important factors in interpersonal relationships:

1. **Positive feedback feeds our ego need for praise, recognition, and appreciation.** Studies have repeatedly shown that praise and recognition are among the strongest, if not the strongest, of human motivators.
2. **It reinforces desirable behaviors** because people can’t get enough praise and recognition.
3. **It can modify inappropriate behaviors** among others when they see someone else being praised and recognized for desirable behaviors.

When you miss the daily opportunities to reinforce desired behaviors through feedback and recognition, you miss one of the easiest things you can do to influence the performance of your work team. To do so, you simply need to focus on your people, be aware of the many things they do right on a daily basis, and get in the habit of recognizing and thanking them. Nothing could be simpler or more effective in building morale and fostering employee empowerment!

Rewarding People

It's also important to reward people for going above and beyond expectations. If you've given an individual additional duties, if he or she has completed a challenging assignment or project, if your team has met specific goals, find a way to reward them for their contribution.

If your team has helped improve financial performance, try to share some of the benefit with them. If you can set goals with measurable results, such as increased wine or dessert sales, your staff can not only track their progress, but you can establish some specific rewards for accomplishing the goals.

Rewards can come in many forms. Tie some incentive payments into the goals you set. Throw a section or department party to recognize their achievement and invite your boss to help recognize their efforts. Consider those who have made significant contribution for promotion or a well-deserved pay increase.

Any rewards you establish will depend upon the specifics of your goals, the results achieved, and your department's budget. No matter the particulars of each situation, be creative and find a way to offer rewards as well as recognition for the accomplishments of your team. It will only increase their desire to make meaningful contributions since they will know that any improvements will benefit them as well.

IX – IMPLEMENTING AND FOSTERING EMPOWERMENT

In reviewing our club operations, there are three principal areas where empowered employees can contribute significantly to improved operations.

1. **Resolving member issues.**
2. **Helping improve work processes** as part of Continual Process Improvement.
3. **Taking on certain delegated management functions.**

Resolving Member Issues

Employees who deal most directly with members on a day-to-day basis are in the best position to solve service issues and resolve member complaints in a timely fashion or before they escalate into larger issues. Unfortunately, in many clubs front line employees are seen as the first line of defense in saying “no” to members. Only when the member gets sufficiently angry and demands to see the manager, can the problem be solved. Yet this approach sends two very wrong messages – one to the member that says we don’t trust you and we don’t mind wasting more of your time as you explain the problem again to a manager; and the other to employees that says that we won’t let you say “yes,” but we, the managers, often will, thereby contradicting you and making you look bad.

Since the bottom line in all our dealings with members is to say “yes,” there is no reason to put either the member or the employee in the situation described above. A far better solution is to provide useful guidance to employees and give them both the responsibility and the resources to solve service issues. A good start would be to allow employees to decide on their own how to resolve any issue by “spending” up to \$200 to fix the problem – either by “comping” a meal, sending a token of apology, or doing something special for the member.

The \$200 cost is insignificant compared to the loss of member goodwill and patronage and is a small price to pay if a lesson can be learned or a work process improved.

And herein is **the important point**, every time employees use their authority and spend money to solve a problem, they must fill out a Service Issue Resolution (or SIR) form (think Yes SIR!), CRI Form 180, explaining in detail what went wrong and what could be done differently in the future. This lesson learned is used to improve the organization and service. A point of caution: in order for employees to feel comfortable in reporting what might be seen as their mistake, they must never be punished or embarrassed by their failure. In the end, most failures are a result of inadequate organizational systems, poor work flow, lack of training, or other management failures – not the failure of an individual employee. In those cases where it truly is the employee’s fault, coach him or her in a supportive way with the intent of improving, not blaming. For an example of a Service Issue Resolution form, see Appendix B.

Inevitably, in instituting a process of employees solving service problems there will be hiccups, yet these can be addressed as they arise. When employees gain more confidence in their abilities to resolve issues and as management continually improves work processes based upon reports of problems, a culture of quality service will gain momentum (remember Jim Collins’ *Good to Great* Flywheel). Employees will feed off each other’s successes and take the initiative to solve a host of little service issues as they take more pride in their work and their contribution to the overall effort.

Helping Improve Work Processes

Part of your club's culture should be to foster a process of Continual Improvement in all aspects of your operations. This means that you should review systems, standards, policies, procedures, programming, training, and work processes to continually improve the way you do business and provide service. While managers typically have broad industry experience and the big picture of what is necessary to succeed, it is the line employee who is most closely connected with the member and the details of service. Who, then, would be in a better position to recommend improved work processes than the person who works most closely with service and service delivery?

As we have often said before, in our business the devil is in the detail. When you make a commitment to involve your employees in designing and improving work processes, they become energized by the involvement and look for more and more ways to contribute. The more involved they become in contributing to the success of the organization, the more responsibility they will assume for ensuring that success.

Taking on Delegated Functions

As empowered employees take on more responsibility, managers can select individuals, who show both the motivation and aptitude, to take on some of the management functions of the organization. An excellent example is provided again by the Ritz-Carlton Company. They select and train certain individuals to conduct initial screening interviews with prospective employees. These empowered employees relish the task and see themselves as the gatekeepers in keeping the company's hiring standards as high as possible. They get paid slightly more for their additional duty and derive prestige in being given this important task.

Necessities for Empowerment

Having reviewed the benefits of empowering employees, we again state what is necessary for a club to provide this empowerment.

First and foremost, strong leadership is an absolute necessity. Leaders must:

- Embrace the principles of service-based leadership.
- Be open with their employees.
- Be trusting and trusted.
- Be secure in themselves, their position, and their knowledge; not threatened by knowledgeable employees or those who show initiative.
- Be willing to share praise and shoulder blame.
- Be good communicators.
- Intrinsically understand and value the important role of line employees in the organization.
- Place a positive emphasis on problem discovery and solution.
- Allow their employees to demonstrate initiative and innovation, while giving them the "freedom to fail" without repercussions.

Secondly, the necessary disciplines and systems must be established to continually review work processes while involving employees. It's also important that procedures be in place to keep the General Manager and other Department Heads fully informed of any resulting changes.

Next, the club must be committed to and deliver extensive, ongoing training to its employees. Untrained employees cause confusion and the resulting chaos will drive good employees away.

Employees must also be recognized for their accomplishments and contributions. This recognition will further cement the partnership.

There must be opportunities for employees to grow personally and professionally. When employees know that the club is also committed to their advancement, they will more willingly participate in making it successful.

Lastly, employees must respect their leaders and willingly follow them. They will only do this when they see their leaders' passion for excellence and personal commitment to success. There can be no substitute for this example.

Summary

Empowering employees is a requirement in any effort to provide remarkable service. Busy managers cannot do it all and need the help of their willing, committed, and empowered employees. While it takes time and effort to establish a culture of empowerment at a club, the resulting improvement in operations, efficiency, and service levels make it well worth the effort.

X – THE MANY WAYS TO “KILL” EMPOWERMENT

There are a number of ways to destroy employee empowerment; and none of them are caused by employees. If your employees do not feel empowered, look no further than your leadership and the way you interact with your people. In searching for reasons empowerment isn't working, focus on the following:

1. **You are only paying lip service to empowerment.** Without your sincere commitment to your employees and their success, they will recognize your “empowerment” as a sham and will become more cynical and disaffected the more you try to encourage their “empowerment.”
2. **You don't really understand what empowerment is.** If you fail to realize that empowerment begins and ends with your leadership, if you think that empowerment is something your employees have to create, expecting your employees to act in empowered ways is a waste of time and energy.
3. **You haven't provided the “big picture” context of what your organization is trying to achieve.** Your employees need to understand how their contribution furthers the basic aims of the organization.
4. **You've failed to give your employees the information and training they need to understand the context and scope of their empowerment.** When you ask them to take on additional responsibilities as empowered employees, they need to understand why and what the benefits are to them as well as to you and the club. They will also need examples of what empowered behavior is. Lastly, they will need to know that they will not be blamed or punished for making mistakes.
5. **You have failed to give your employees guidelines for empowerment.** To feel confident in taking empowered action, employees must understand the limits of their authority to act. Ensuring they understand these limits is critical to success. You may have to explain, reiterate, and clarify these limits a number of times before your employees truly feel comfortable with the new behaviors you are asking of them.
6. **You've given them guidelines, but then micromanage them.** Maybe you've done a good job of defining limits, but if you then turn around and give them detailed instructions of how to handle every situation, they will quickly understand that they are not “empowered” and that you will continue to make all the decisions, no matter how trivial.
7. **You second guess the decisions you've authorized your employees to make.** After giving your employees the guidelines to make empowered decisions, you second guess and criticize every decision they make. Put yourself in their shoes; how long would you put up with this before throwing in the towel on “employee empowerment”?
8. **You have failed to give feedback on how your empowered employees are doing.** Feedback, particularly in the early period of empowerment, is critical so that employees understand by constant discussion and explanation what they are doing right and what can be improved on. Once they achieve a critical mass of understanding, they will feel more and more confident of their actions, will need less guidance, and will be looking for more and more ways to contribute.
9. **Once you've given employees the authority to act, you fail to take further responsibility for their actions.** The idea of empowerment is not to give your employees your duties and responsibilities and then wash your hands of them. You can delegate authority, but not responsibility. You are still responsible for

the performance of your employees. You must stay engaged and take full responsibility for any errors your empowered employees make and problems they create. When this happens, you must not blame them; rather you must accept responsibility yourself. There is always more you could have done to ensure that they understood and correctly applied their empowerment.

10. **You fail to remove barriers to their empowerment.** Telling employees that they are empowered, but not giving them the tools, training, and support they need to actually be empowered, will quickly end your experiment in empowerment. Telling employees that they can “spend” up to \$200 per member per day to solve service problems is all well and good, but you also have to work with the accounting office to devise an efficient process to do this.
11. **You have failed to recognize and show appreciation for your employees’ empowered actions.** Employee empowerment means you have asked your employees to take on additional responsibilities. Ultimately, empowered employees will make your job easier and allow you to focus on other issues. For this reason alone, you should be grateful to your employees and show your appreciation for what they are doing.
12. **You have failed to value your employees.** Without the most basic sense that they are valued and recognized as partners in your efforts to provide quality and service to members, they will recognize that your program of “empowerment” is just a way to manipulate them. People who think they are being manipulated are resentful and will be unresponsive to your continued exhortations to be “empowered.”

CONCLUSION

Employee Empowerment is one of the most powerful things a leader can do to improve the performance of his or her team. Further, it is an essential element in the Quest for Remarkable Service. The effort you put into empowering your employees will give returns beyond your wildest expectations.

You must, however, keep in mind that Employee Empowerment is not a management initiative that you can roll out at will. For employees to feel empowered, you have to create a culture that nourishes and sustains it. By conscientiously and sincerely working to become the best service-based leader you can be as described in *Leadership on the Line*, you will create an environment where employees will recognize their empowerment and enthusiastically act on it in all they do.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE EMPOWERMENT GUIDELINES

Team: Food service staff to include kitchen production, beverage, and dining room staffs.

Goal: 100% member satisfaction with all products and service.

Empowerment Guidelines:

1. Consult with host(ess) to adjust table assignments for reserved parties to meet seating requests. While making changes may not always be possible, make every effort to do so. When requested tables are unavailable, offer alternative solutions to meet member requests.
2. Offer complimentary “quick bite” snacks to help pacify any toddlers in parties.
3. Suggest and facilitate “mini-tastings” of menu items for diners who may be unsure of menu choices.
4. Consult with Chef or Sous Chef regarding any special requests or to offer alternative preparations for food allergies or dietetic needs.
5. Order and serve complimentary “*amuse*” or appetizers if kitchen prep is slow.
6. Immediately and cheerfully return, replace, or correct without charge any served item that is not to a member’s liking.
7. Use “Service Recovery – The Seven Step Process,” to respond to any member complaint or dissatisfaction with food items, beverages, or service.
8. You are authorized to spend up to \$200 per member per day to compensate diners for anything less than remarkable service. The purpose of this authority is not to give money away, but to ensure that members are completely satisfied with their dining experience and the value they’ve received.

Any time you exercise this authority, you must fill out a Service Issue Resolution, CRI Form 180, so that the team can learn from any service issues and avoid any organizational deficiencies in the future by correcting them.

The \$200 can be in the form of a “comped” course or meal, a complimentary round of drinks or dessert, or any other “token” of our apology for less than satisfactory service. In extreme cases, it may be flowers sent to the member’s home the following day with a note of apology. Team members are encouraged to be creative in exercising their authority for maximum impact.

All expenses incurred under the \$200 authority will be charged to the “Make It Right” key on the point of sale system or coded to the “Service Adjustment Account.”

9. The team will devote time at each pre-shift meeting to briefly review Service Issue Resolution forms and will discuss them more thoroughly at regular team meetings.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SERVICE ISSUE RESOLUTION FORM

Club Resources International	Service Issue Resolution
Name: <i>Jennifer Hansen</i>	Department: <i>Food and Beverage</i>
Job Title: <i>Server</i>	
Date/Time of Issue or Incident: <i>Sat, 8/16, 6:20 p.m.</i>	Location: <i>Main Dining Room</i>
<p>The Service Issue Resolution form is to be used to learn lessons from service issues involving members. The form must be filled out anytime an employee uses his authorization to spend money to resolve an issue, whether by "comping" a meal or service, providing a token or apology, or doing something special for a member. It may also be used anytime an employee witnesses a potential service problem or has an idea to improve service or service delivery.</p>	
Name(s) of Member(s): <i>Mr. and Mrs. Robert Jones and two children</i>	
Describe Service Issue or Incident:	
<i>Mr. Jones ordered his New York Strip Steak rare. When Mr. Jones cut into his steak, it was cooked medium. In checking with the kitchen I discovered that John Thompson picked up the wrong plate and served Mr. Jones' steak to one of his tables. It took the kitchen ten minutes to prepare another steak. Mr. Jones was not happy since they were on their way to the movie theater.</i>	
Continue on back if necessary	
Contributing Factors to Issue or Incident:	
<i>As busy as we were Saturday night, we did not have an expediter. At the time I picked up my order there must have been six other orders in the window. An expediter may have prevented the problem.</i>	
Resolution of Issue or Incident:	
<i>I "comped" Mr. Jones meal and brought complimentary desserts for his children while he was finishing his dinner. I overheard Mr. Jones tell his wife that this was the second time in three weeks that his steak had not been prepared as he ordered it.</i>	
Recommend Follow-up Phone Call: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No by whom: <input type="checkbox"/> GM <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dept Head	
Suggested Process Improvement to Avoid Future Issues:	
<i>In addition to an expediter on all busy nights, why don't we order some plastic markers to put into the steaks to indicate the degree of doneness. It might preclude servers picking up the wrong orders.</i>	
Employee's Signature: <i>Jennifer Hansen</i>	Date: <i>8/16/08</i>
Supervisor's Signature: <i>Michael Rjenzi</i>	Date: <i>8/18/08</i>