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Employee Empowerment: A Guest-Driven Leadership Strategy

The best way to ensure your guests' satisfaction is by empowering your employees to handle the guests' needs or problems immediately, rather than waiting for a manager to take care of things

by **Robert A. Brymer**

“MANAGERS in the hotel business must train employees and empower them to handle most guest incidents on the spot and with good judgment—promptly, professionally, and courteously. This will improve guest service and satisfaction, create a better working environment for the employees, and free up more time for managers to focus on the tasks of being a manager.”¹

¹These comments were made in 1988 by Edward G. Sullivan while he was regional vice president for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts. In February 1991, Sullivan retired from Hyatt after 31 years with the company.

When Edward Sullivan first made those comments, it sounded like an unusual and radical approach to managing a hotel. In the first place, how could managers give employees the power to handle guest challenges? Isn't such decision-making authority what managers have worked so hard to get? Secondly, wouldn't employees be inclined to give away too much, without regard to costs and the bottom line?

Many excuses exist as to why “employee empowerment” will not work in hospitality operations. But virtually every one of those excuses is the result of a lack of knowledge

and understanding about how decentralized decision-making has been successful in guest-service oriented companies, including hotels and restaurants. This article shows how employee empowerment can and does work, and provides a step-by-step framework that has been used for implementing employee-empowerment programs into hospitality operations.

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The information presented here is based on field studies, interviews with general managers who have successfully implemented employee empowerment, and a thorough literature review of the relevant research on the concept of employee empowerment. In explaining how to implement an employee-empowerment program I have chosen as my model a hotel setting. But keep in mind that employee empowerment can work for any business that relies on guest service.

What is employee empowerment? Employee empowerment is the process of decentralizing decision-making in an organization, whereby managers give more discretion and autonomy to the front-line employees.² It involves fundamental changes to the traditional hierarchal organizational structure that most hospitality-management programs teach, and how most hospitality operations are run. Employee empowerment is a leadership philosophy, and not a passing fad that can be casually abandoned down the road.

If you choose to use empowerment, your organizational chart will appear to be more flattened than before, because some levels of authority will be removed and responsibility for guest service will be spread among managers and employees. "Any business organization seeking to establish a customer orientation and create a good impression...must flatten the [organizational] pyramid—that is, eliminate the hierarchical tiers of responsibility in order to respond directly and quickly to customers' needs."³

The empirical research and evidence of employee empowerment as practiced in hospitality

settings is limited. However, several major corporations in the hospitality industry have demonstrated their growing support and understanding of the benefits associated with implementing employee empowerment. Furthermore, several companies have embarked on campaigns to remove or trim hierarchic organizational levels and reapportion more responsibility to front-line employees.

Implementing Employee Empowerment

Before a hotel owner can seriously consider employee empowerment as a realistic option, there are three conditions that should be met: (1) There should be a strong commitment by the general manager and the hotel executive committee, along with support from the corporate offices, for the empowerment philosophy; (2) The general manager and executive committee should agree on the desired outcome of such a program; and (3) Specific goals and target dates should be established.

Making the commitment.

Employees who are reprimanded or criticized for making decisions that are not consistent with what the boss might have done will be very reluctant ever to make a decision again. This is not to say employees shouldn't be corrected and instructed on how to handle a situation better. But it's important that they be praised for taking the initiative and making a decision for the sake of guest service and satisfaction.

I recommend that the general manager, executive committee, and eventually all department heads investigate the success of employee empowerment in guest-service operations. An excellent way to do this is by reading the book *Moments of Truth*, by Jan Carlzon, president of Scandinavian Airlines

(see the box on page 68). It is written clearly and concisely, and from a practical, operational point of view that illustrates the benefits and potential downfalls of employee empowerment.

Managers should also meet with other hoteliers who have practiced this philosophy for a year or more, and thereby learn from someone else's actual experiences.

The shared vision. The general manager and the executive committee must discuss their expectations and their reservations about how the employee-empowerment program will work. How will they and the other managers accept this idea of relinquishing some of the decision-making responsibility? What are the potential roadblocks and what can be done to pave a smoother road for acceptance and implementation? Exactly how will the program improve service? Where do they see potential benefits and pitfalls?

The goals. It is important for the general manager and executive committee to decide what specific goals they would like to achieve by implementing employee empowerment. Those goals should be specific, measurable, and attainable for a predetermined date (e.g., in one year the hotel will have a 50-percent improvement in guest satisfaction as measured by corporate standards).

Structure versus Flexibility

The next decision to be made by the general manager and the executive committee is whether their goals are best achieved through structured empowerment or flexible empowerment.

Structured empowerment provides specific guidelines for the front-line employees. It gives those employees the ability to make decisions but within specified and detailed limits. The management

²Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), p. 257.

³Jan Carlzon, *Moments of Truth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 60.

staff of the Hilton Hotel at Walt Disney World Village, under the direction of general manager Samir A. Shafei, has developed guidelines for implementing structured employee empowerment (see Exhibit 1).

Flexible empowerment allows the employees more latitude in making on-the-spot decisions that directly affect guest service and satisfaction. Very broad guidelines and limits are issued and employees are expected and trained to use good business sense in making decisions that they feel would be the best course of action in satisfying a guest (see Exhibit 2).

Tell the Middle Managers

It is the responsibility of the general manager and the executive committee to communicate their ideas with the other managers in the hotel, to help them deal with their apprehensions and misunderstandings, and to coach them through the process. Most likely, many of the issues with which the general manager and the executive committee were initially concerned will be the same issues expressed by the other management personnel.

Employee empowerment must have the full support of the middle managers, as they will be the key to its success in the hotel. Department heads and other group leaders must understand and believe in the philosophy and goals of empowerment, since they are the ones who will train the employees to implement the program.

Everyone benefits. It should be explained to the department managers that they will realize many benefits from the program, including the following.

- (1) Adjustments to guest bills will likely not increase, and in some cases there may actually be a decrease in adjustments.

EXHIBIT 1

Structured empowerment

<u>Guest complaints or problems</u>	<u>Actions front-desk clerk is authorized to take</u>
1. A guest announces during check out that he or she experienced a room-related problem (e.g., no hot water, bad television reception, room was too noisy, lack of heat)	Offer an upgrade for next visit, or adjust current bill by as much as \$100. Make logbook notation
2. At check out, a guest complains about something unrelated to his or her room, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service in the café or dining room • The guest did not receive some item that he or she requested (extra towels, soap, blankets, etc.) • The maintenance department was slow to respond to some complaint • Luggage or parcels were delivered late • Mail or messages were not received 	Adjust guest's current bill as indicated and make a logbook notation \$50, and advise supervisor \$50 \$50 \$100, and advise supervisor
3. A guest is charged an incorrect rate	The supervisor should make the room adjustment
4. Guest experiences a problem with the room key or lock	Offer an upgrade for next visit, or adjust current bill by as much as \$100. Make a logbook notation
5. Guest reports that a complaint was passed from department to department	Offer an upgrade for next visit, or adjust current bill by as much as \$100. Advise the supervisor
6. Guest insists that he or she did not incur any mini-bar charges	Make the adjustment
7. Guest disputes phone charges	Make the adjustment
8. Guest complains about a rude or insensitive employee	Refer problem to the assistant manager

These sample guidelines for how a structured-empowerment program can be implemented by the front-office staff were developed by the management and employees of the Hilton Hotel at Walt Disney World Village.

EXHIBIT 2

Flexible empowerment

Outlined below are a few examples of how front-office and food and beverage employees may be instructed to handle guest challenges in a flexible and creative manner. During employee training, it's important to emphasize that one of the "products" being sold by your company is guest satisfaction, and the goal of empowerment is to ensure the quality of that product. The autonomy and power that are given to "empowered employees" go far beyond the authority to make adjustments of cash-register transactions; rather, the idea is to encourage the employees to improve customer service and guest satisfaction in as many different ways as possible.

In any situation involving a service problem, the first step is to listen carefully to the guest's complaint. The employee who hears the complaint now "owns the problem," and must take action to correct it. The employee should ask the guest, "What may I do for you to resolve the problem?" The employee is authorized to take the necessary steps to satisfy the guest.

Guidelines for resolving a complaint during check-out

If the guest is uncertain how she or he would like the problem to be resolved, the employee should ask if the guest is planning a return visit in the near future. If so, offer to her or him an upgrade at no additional charge. If the guest does not plan to return soon, the employee may ask again of the guest, "What may I do to help make up for the inconvenience you experienced?" Follow through with the guest's suggestion or propose to the guest one of the company's approved adjustments, including making changes to the current room bill.

Guidelines for resolving the complaint of an in-house guest

If the guest is uncertain how she or he would like the problem to be resolved, the employee should send an amenity to the guest's room and then call the guest to make sure, in a professional and subtle manner, that the guest has been mollified. If the employee determines that the guest is still upset, an upgrade at no extra cost may be offered for the guest's next visit. If no visit is planned for the near future, ask the guest, "What else may I do to help make up for the inconvenience you encountered?" Follow through with the guest's suggestion, including making any requested adjustment to the current room bill.

Guidelines for the food and beverage staff

Offer to replace the item in question at no additional charge. If this cannot be done, offer the guest a complimentary dessert, beverage, or bottle of wine. If such efforts do not appease the guest, ask "What else may I offer to help make up for the inconvenience you experienced?" Follow through with the guest's suggestion, including making any requested adjustment to the current food check.

For any customer-service event, employees have to consult supervisors only in the most extreme circumstances (e.g., a guest insists that the entire \$500 bill should be waived because the guest says the hotel's pillows are uncomfortable). Otherwise, employees have the authority to make reasonable decisions to satisfy guests.

Managers may choose to impose a top limit on the dollar value of the adjustment that an employee may make (e.g., \$500 per guest at check out, \$100 per food and beverage check). For any adjustments below such limits, employees should be encouraged to be creative and flexible. If a guest insists on an adjustment in excess of the limit (or if the problem warrants an exceptional adjustment), a manager or supervisor must be consulted.

According to Raymond F. Sylvester, general manager of the Westin Canal Place, in New Orleans (a property that has incorporated an empowerment program), "Managers practicing employee empowerment often find that employees take on more 'ownership,' assuming more responsibility for controlling costs." Also, according to Sylvester, when a line employee can respond to a guest's need at the point of contact, quite often the guest is satisfied with the fact that the employee acted immediately to satisfy the guest.

When such immediate attention is coupled with asking the guest for her or his suggestions for resolving the problem, you may expect that the guest will accept a reasonable, minimal settlement (e.g., a gift or small room-charge adjustment). On the other hand, a guest concern that reaches a manager or supervisor may cause additional time delays and inconvenience to the guest, which can heighten the guest's expectations for a larger adjustment.

- (2) Managers may develop more trust in and better rapport with front-line employees when those employees are allowed to share in the responsibility for guest satisfaction. Under an empowerment program, managers and employees work together as a team, more in an adult-to-adult relationship and less in an adult-to-child relationship, as often happens between managers and employees.
- (3) Managers will experience fewer interruptions when employees can take action on guest service and satisfaction. As employees make more decisions on their own, managers will have more

get ready for the reception, there in his room was an iron and ironing board, sent up by housekeeping at the request of the bellman. Needless to say, the salesman was extremely impressed by the exemplary service provided by the hotel's staff.

Moving the Program to the Front Line

When department managers are sure that neither their jobs nor authority are threatened by implementing employee empowerment, they will be much more willing to incorporate such a program into the hotel's everyday operations.

The following steps can be used by managers to implement employee empowerment into a property's daily routine, particularly at the critical point of contact between guests and front-line employees.

Step 1. Schedule a department meeting for all employees and supervisors. In announcing the meeting, it must be explained to the employees that the focus of the meeting will be to improve guest satisfaction through expanded employee involvement. I recommend that the general manager be in attendance along with that member of the executive committee who is most closely aligned with the department. Large departments that cannot schedule all employees and supervisors to meet at one time may have to arrange for more than one meeting to reach everyone. In any event, it is important that every employee be personally introduced to the concept and that no employees are left to hear the information second or third hand.

Step 2. Explain to the employees that the hotel is taking a "new" look at how it delivers guest services. To improve service delivery, management will give all

employees more power to make decisions that directly affect guest service and satisfaction, a concept called "employee empowerment." The idea behind the concept, it should be further explained, is to treat each guest and his or her particular situation individually, and to minimize bureaucratic delays and red tape that can create further guest inconvenience. In doing so, employees may "turn a guest problem into a guest opportunity," as so eloquently described by Meg Gilbert-Crofton, director, resorts human-resource development, at Walt Disney World. This new employee authority includes the use of discretion and good common sense, and management will train and work with the employees to assist them with the transition into their new role.

At this point in the meeting, it may help to give the employees an example of how employee empowerment can work to improve guest service in the hotel.

Step 3. Ask the general manager and the executive-committee members attending the meeting to communicate their goals for guest service and satisfaction and how they support this endeavor through the use of employee empowerment. By bearing witness to their deep commitment to the program, these top management representatives can help persuade and motivate employees. The main purpose of having these executives at the meeting is to show their full support for this new and bold guest-service program. At the same time, they can take the opportunity to address the employees' concerns.

One of the many questions employees are likely to ask will be, "What will happen if I make a decision that my manager doesn't like or agree with?" The general manager and executive-committee member must be unmistakably clear when answering this ques-

tion: Management at all levels will support employees' decisions to improve guest service and satisfaction. Employees will not be interrupted, corrected, or halted in the middle of exercising their decision to satisfy a guest. Although an employee's decision may be different from what the manager might have done, and this difference may be reviewed with the employee after the employee-guest interaction is completed, management will continue to support and encourage employee decisions to improve guest service. It should also be explained that management expects good common sense to be applied, and that the empowerment program is not an open invitation for employees to take advantage of the hotel.

Step 4. Tell the employees how this approach will improve their jobs. Even your least skeptical employees will want to know, "What's in it for me?" Listed below are some of the program's benefits that will be of direct interest to your employees.

- (1) Employees will be given more authority, autonomy, and flexibility, and will be encouraged to be innovative and creative. Such an increase in responsibility will give them a sense of having ownership in the hotel. Managers will show more trust and respect for employees than before, the result of which may create more positive employee-guest interactions.
- (2) There will be full support from management. The managers will ask the employees, "What can we do to help you better serve the guests?" Management will listen more carefully to the front-line workers, and will try to help the employees to attend better to the guests.
- (3) The new program will save employees time. Guest prob-

lems can be resolved quickly when a supervisor or manager doesn't have to be located, apprised of the situation, and asked to render a decision. Such a benefit is especially important on busy days, as it allows employees to serve all guests in a personalized and efficient fashion.

- (4) Guest challenges will be handled in an accurate and personal manner. As a guest challenge arises, an employee can make the appropriate decision and take the necessary action according to that individual guest's needs at that specific moment. All guests want to be treated like individuals, and employee empowerment creates an environment where such is possible. All guests remember the hotel where they were made to feel welcome, comfortable, and even pampered by the employees.

Step 5. Discuss the type of employee empowerment that will be implemented, namely structured or flexible empowerment (as discussed previously). The department head and assistant department head will have prepared the department's goals prior to this meeting and should be ready to explain how much decentralized decision-making top management has built into the overall empowerment strategy. If the structured-empowerment option has been chosen, employees should have some input on the limits imposed. If the flexible-empowerment option has been selected, discretion and good business judgment should be discussed.

Whichever option you implement, the experience level of the employees should be considered. For example, experienced employees usually have more difficulty initially accepting decision-making responsibility. That is because they

most likely are accustomed to reverse delegation, which means passing on guest challenges upward to their boss or perhaps to another department. However, once they've made the transition and have accepted empowerment, they can rely on their operations experience for making informed decisions. They will be knowledgeable about what to do and where to turn in resolving a guest challenge.

Newly hired employees, on the other hand, will usually have the reverse reaction. They will accept "bottoms-up" decision-making much more readily, taking on guest challenges with a fresh and energetic approach. Their inexperience with the operation and in dealing with guests, however, will sometimes require that newly hired employees seek advice on what to do (or be corrected after the fact). Advanced training on how to handle different situations is very important for inexperienced employees. A structured empowerment program acts to alleviate at least some of the problems associated with decision-making by inexperienced workers. Either way, employee empowerment is an ongoing training process for both experienced and newly hired employees.

Step 6. Introduce the skills necessary to accomplish effective guest service. Once your employees understand your expectations and their expanded responsibility to make guest-satisfaction decisions, you can teach them the skills they'll need to do the job. For example, employee training must now emphasize communication and interpersonal skills.

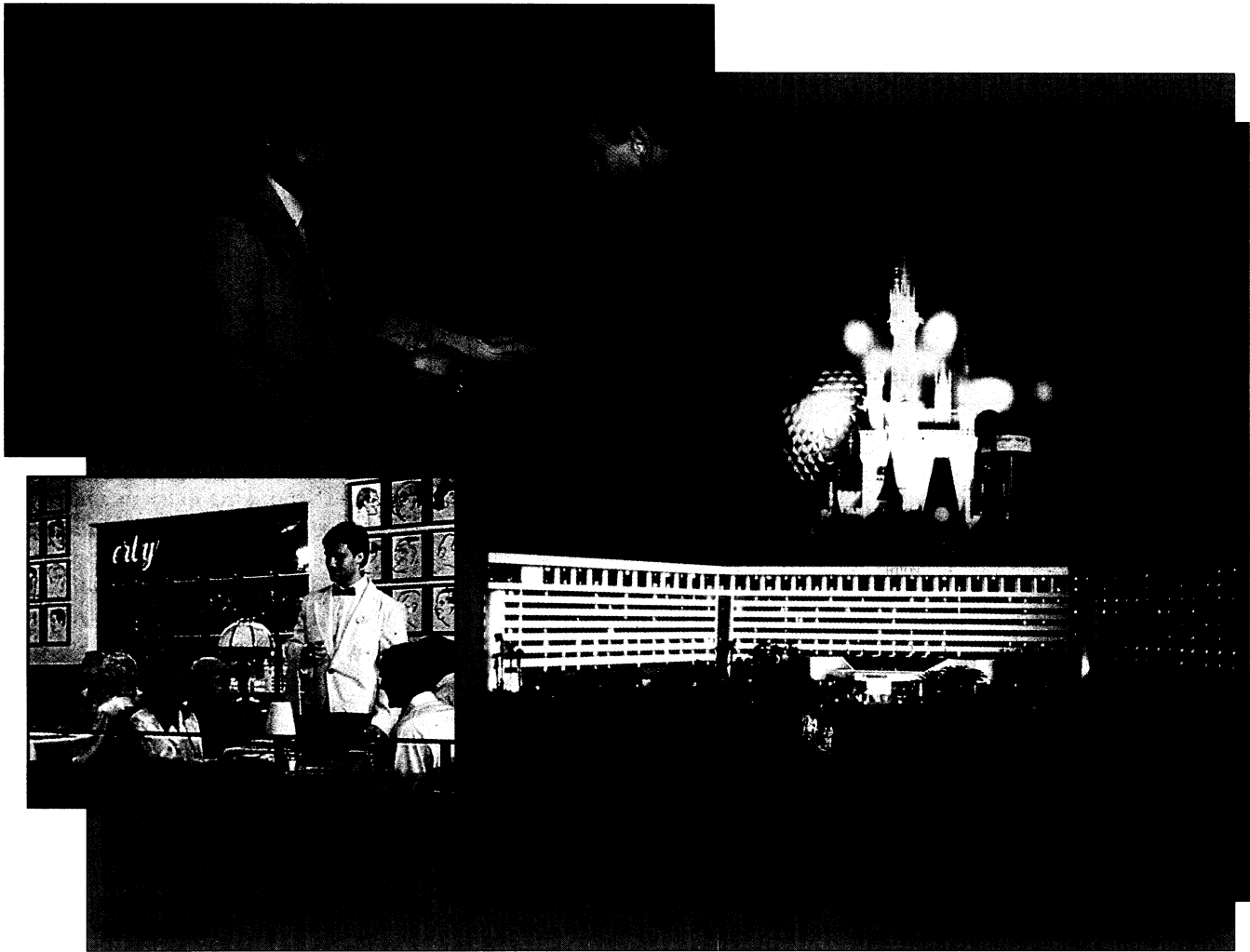
When a guest challenge arises, employees must show interest and compassion through proper listening and speaking skills. Discuss these openly and frankly among the employees, and ask the senior employees for suggestions on

techniques they have used successfully to improve their listening and speaking skills. Encourage the two-way exchange of ideas. Here's a sampling of the points you'll want to raise.

- Let the guest completely explain his or her side of the situation, without interruption or challenge.
- Use facial gestures, eye contact, and body language to demonstrate concern.
- Stay positive and refrain from using negative comments.
- Give a sincere apology on behalf of the hotel or department.
- Use the guest's name.
- Whenever possible and appropriate, smile.

Another guest-service hint to pass on to your employees is that, when listening and speaking with guests, particularly guests who are experiencing difficulty, it is important for employees to maintain discretion. Inflammatory remarks made by a guest or an employee's apology for inadequate service may be overheard by guests standing or seated nearby, either in line or perhaps at a nearby table. Such conversations, if overheard, can have a negative influence on other guests and should be avoided when and where possible. At the front desk, lines can be organized to minimize the opportunity for inadvertent eavesdropping. Employees in other areas can be instructed on how to position themselves in a manner that will reduce the possibility of being overheard when conversing with guests.

Proper listening and speaking skills are important aspects of handling a guest problem, but certainly not the only training concern. Employee empowerment also includes "ownership" of a guest problem. When a guest explains to an employee a problem, the employee who hears the



complaint must “own the problem”—even if the complaint involves another department. For example, if a guest in the restaurant explains that the television did not work properly in his room that morning, it would be the responsibility of the server to ask the guest if anything had been done to correct the problem. If nothing had been done, the server—who now “owns” the problem—would make sure that the proper department knew about the broken television in the guest’s room.

One company’s policy regarding the ownership of guest problems was explained to me by Edward V. Staros, regional vice president for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. At Ritz-Carlton, employees are

taught these rules: “Any employee who receives a guest complaint ‘owns’ that complaint. Instant guest pacification will be ensured by all. Respond to guest wishes within ten minutes of the request. Follow up with a telephone call within 20 minutes to ensure their satisfaction.”

Ritz-Carlton employees are also instructed to ask the guest to “please forgive us” when there is a guest complaint, and to obtain more information on the nature of the complaint. The employee must either take necessary steps to correct the complaint, if possible, or notify the proper staff members as soon as possible regarding the nature of the complaint to ensure that the complaint is resolved.

Step 7. Develop a list of ideas or

suggestions for improving guest services, which I refer to as “guest satisfiers.” Using a flip chart or blackboard, the department head can ask the employees for suggestions on how to improve guest service, guest satisfaction, and service delivery. The employees should be able to tell the department head the most commonly expressed interests of the guests (i.e., what are the guests saying that the hotel can do better? What are some guest-satisfier opportunities that the hotel can exploit?)

Keep the meeting focused on specific goals to improve guest service and satisfaction. Without this focus, the meeting may degenerate into a “gripe session,” with employees losing sight of the real purpose of the meeting. In the

event your employees indicate that departmental problems exist, and if those problems are unrelated to guest service, they should be discussed and resolved at another agreed-upon time. At this meeting, the department should be focused on practical and realistic ways the department can improve guest service, guest satisfaction, and service delivery.

For each guest satisfier that fits the hotel's goals and budget, decide how soon it can be implemented, who is responsible for its implementation, and what (if any) resources are required to make it work. When this has been completed, the department will have a practical list of suggestions to improve guest satisfaction and an indication of when and by whom those suggestions will be implemented. Later, the department head must follow up to ensure that the agreed-upon actions have been taken. This will help demonstrate that management is committed to improved guest service and is ready to take employee participation seriously—that employee empowerment works with management as well as with guests!

Step 8. End the meeting by reinforcing the top management's commitment to achieving the hotel and departmental goals through employee empowerment. It is essential that management inspire the employees to take on more responsibility by creating an atmosphere where staff members feel they can dare to use their new authority.

The purpose of shifting decision-making to the employees is not to remove managers totally from making decisions, or to turn the operation into a democracy. Indeed, it is management's "new role" to guide, assist, and support the employees in achieving success through this guest-driven leadership strategy. Managers will no

longer make all the decisions—but they will be available when necessary. The manager's new role includes creating an environment where decisions can be made by the front-line employees, at the point of contact with the guests. Guest-service opportunities can be best handled on the spot, by the staff members on the front line, and those employees must be encouraged and trained to do so.

Once all points have been communicated effectively and no questions remain, another meeting should be scheduled for sometime within the next 30 days.

Step 9. Prepare a written report of the first meeting. Share the report with all the employees, making sure it includes the following information.

(1) The chosen framework.

Explain the concept of empowerment, the program's goals, and the limits (if any) on employee intervention.

(2) Listening and speaking skills.

Review those communication and interpersonal skills that are most useful and appropriate for the department.

(3) "Owning a problem." Reinforce the concept of "ownership" and reiterate any procedures that were agreed upon at the meeting.

(4) Guest satisfiers. Publish the list that shows what actions are to be taken, who is responsible for each item, and when they should be completed or revisited.

The preparation and distribution of a written report will help convince employees that the top management is really dedicated to implementing such a plan. Because employees are being asked to take some additional risk and responsibility in their jobs, they must first have a sense of security before doing so. Also, when the plan is in writing, it can help clarify any

misunderstandings or uncertainties that may be left over from the first meeting. Give the employees at least a few days to review this information prior to the second meeting.

Step 10. Use the second department meeting as an opportunity for managers, supervisors, and employees to discuss openly the employee-empowerment guidelines that were established in the first meeting and circulated as part of the written report. Additions, deletions, or modifications can be discussed and incorporated (or not) at this time. This meeting should produce a set of working guidelines for implementing employee empowerment so that everyone in the department has a shared understanding of how to proceed. Set the wheels in motion by asking everyone in the department to begin using the program in their daily operations. After all questions and concerns have been dealt with, schedule the third department meeting for sometime within 30 to 60 days.

Step 11. Provide motivation and support for the front-line employees in their efforts to assume more responsibility. Under this new system, the role of the manager is to be informative and constructively critical, using praise and positive feedback to encourage and train the employees. It will help if you can spend time with the employees on the front line and continually remind them to exercise their new decision-making authority.

Give guidance—not reprimands—to employees who take risks and occasionally make mistakes. Try to avoid labeling decisions as either "right" or "wrong." Remember, the primary goal is to make good business decisions that will satisfy the guests. Decisions about which you disagree can be a basis for training,

and decisions that employees handle in a manner you feel is appropriate can serve as a basis for praise and reinforcement.

Giving employees the freedom to make mistakes is not tantamount to institutionalizing incompetence. Employees should expect and must receive ongoing support, but they must also be expected and trained to make decisions that consider the well-being of the hotel as well as the guest.

Step 12. Review the department's progress and success in implementing the employee-empowerment program during the third department meeting, which everyone should attend. That means comparing the department's goals and objectives with actual results.

At this time, it's important that employees receive feedback on how they are doing compared to the established goals. The critical measurements are derived from how well they are focusing their energy on the paying guests. Measuring results is particularly crucial for those employees who have an impact on guest service but who do not have face-to-face contact with guests (e.g., the kitchen staff). They need very clear indications from the managers as to how well they are meeting their goals, since they do not have the opportunity to get feedback directly from the guests. Providing these workers with such feedback will keep them involved in and committed to your guest-oriented service strategy.

Some of the ways to measure results are shown in Exhibit 3, and these items should be discussed at the third meeting.

Step 13. Recognize and praise those employees who have demonstrated exemplary judgment. During the third meeting, provide positive reinforcement for those employees who have proved to be

EXHIBIT 3

Measuring the results of an employee empowerment program

Guests' Point of View

- (1) Has there been an increase in the number of positive guest-comment cards?
- (2) Has there been a decrease in the number of negative guest-comment cards?
- (3) Has there been an increase in oral compliments given to managers or employees?
- (4) Has there been a reduction in the number of times a manager has been summoned to resolve a guest challenge?
- (5) Has the management noticed a difference in how employees are responding to guests?

Ask the employees whether they have any additional ideas as to how to measure the guest's viewpoint more accurately in the future.

Employees' Point of View

- (1) Are the employees able to attend to guests' needs more quickly and more personally?
- (2) Do the employees find they have more time for their assigned tasks, now that they are not required to spend time seeking out managers for assistance?
- (3) Do the employees feel as if they are receiving more support from management in their new, empowered roles? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- (4) Has the overall level of interest and job satisfaction among employees increased with empowerment?

Ask the employees whether they have any recommendations on how to measure their viewpoints more accurately in the future.

Management's Point of View

- (1) Have the employees accepted their new-found responsibility and authority in good faith? Have the employees exercised good business judgment?
- (2) Has the level of trust and respect for employees improved?
- (3) Have there been fewer interruptions for managers? Has empowerment given managers more time to concentrate on other tasks?
- (4) Have employees suggested new ways to improve guest service and satisfaction?
- (5) Has there been a change in the number or the amount of adjustments made to guest bills?

Ask the employees whether they have any recommendations on how to measure management's viewpoint more accurately in the future.

particularly good at handling guest challenges. Seize the opportunity to share actual examples of exemplary service with all employees. Doing so will be a great training device as well as demonstrating management's support for those employees that have excelled in adopting empowerment.

I recommend that management

come to this meeting prepared to offer additional rewards for those employees who demonstrate exemplary service in the future. Build a positive reinforcement system for employees by giving them incentives to take guest service and satisfaction seriously and personally. The reinforcements should include both individual and

group recognition. For example, you may want to reward the individual in the department who receives the greatest number of positive guest-comment cards; you can recognize the shift, section, or other sub-group of employees in the department that receives the most positive guest-comment cards; or, you can create some friendly competition among departments in the hotel to attain some predetermined goal.

You may also consider communicating examples of “service distinctiveness” via an in-house (or corporate) newsletter.⁵ Such a medium can provide great reinforcement for the employees, the department, and the hotel. As you can see, rewards do not have to be monetary but may take many different forms.

For most employees, one of the biggest rewards is the opportunity to be proud of their work. Employee empowerment opens up many more opportunities for employees to exercise creativity, flexibility, and autonomy on the job. This will have a beneficial effect on employee self-esteem, and employees who feel better about themselves will be better prepared to serve the guests.

The general manager and executive committee may also consider reinforcements for those department heads who have been successful in implementing employee empowerment. Keep in mind that these middle managers are critical to the success of empowerment. They must be willing to relinquish some of their traditional authority while encouraging and training employees to accept new responsibilities. This will be more difficult for some managers than others, and those who are most successful should be

⁵The term “service distinctiveness” is emphasized by Westin Hotels and Resorts in its newsletter, *WestinWorld*, and in all training materials.

For More Information

For those readers interested in studying employee empowerment to a greater depth, I recommend the following publications as good sources of additional information.

- Karl Albrecht and Ron Zemke, *Service America: Doing Business in the New Economy* (New York: Dow Jones Irwin Publishers, 1985).
- Blake E. Ashforth, “The Experience of Powerlessness in Organizations,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 43, No. 2 (1989), pp. 207–242.
- Ken Blanchard, “Legendary Service Begins at the Bottom,” *Florida Hotel and Motel Journal*, June 1990.
- Jan Carlzon, *Moments of Truth* (New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1987).
- Jay. A. Conger and Rabindra N. Kanungo, “The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice,” *The Academy of Management Review*, 13, No. 3 (July 1988), pp. 471–482.
- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).
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recognized accordingly.

Step 14. Schedule future department meetings to occur every 30 to 60 days, on an ongoing basis. The agendas for these meetings would include some of the following items.

- (1) Elicit feedback from the employees on changing guest needs, and what new goals are needed to meet those needs.
- (2) Review employee-empowerment guidelines for existing and newly hired employees.
- (3) Provide employees with feedback on how well they are doing. The employees should be able to measure their success, receive rewards, and make changes when and where necessary.
- (4) Communicate new department or hotel goals, as determined by the general manager, executive committee, or department head.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

Employee empowerment is not an experimental program that a hotel should “try out” for a year. Rather, it’s a bottom-up leadership philosophy to be incorporated into the every-day fabric of a business’s management and operations. It

involves the improved handling of guest problems when they arise, and exemplary guest service, to be provided by all employees of the company.

Employee empowerment is a guest-driven leadership strategy that can separate those operations that really do provide personalized guest treatment from those operations that merely talk about providing quality service.

Employee empowerment is an ongoing process that must be continually brought to the attention of the employees. Employees must be reminded to take responsibility for making decisions affecting guest service and satisfaction; doing so must become part of their routine, an integral way of performing their job. To accomplish this, management must diligently motivate, train, and reward employees. At the same time, managers must remind themselves to turn over authority to the employees in appropriate ways, to let go of any misgivings and misunderstandings they may have, and to focus on unleashing employee energy by providing the leadership to move forward with this new vision. □