

No Guts, No Glory: *Ten Ways to Ease Into Empowerment*

By JoAnna Brandi

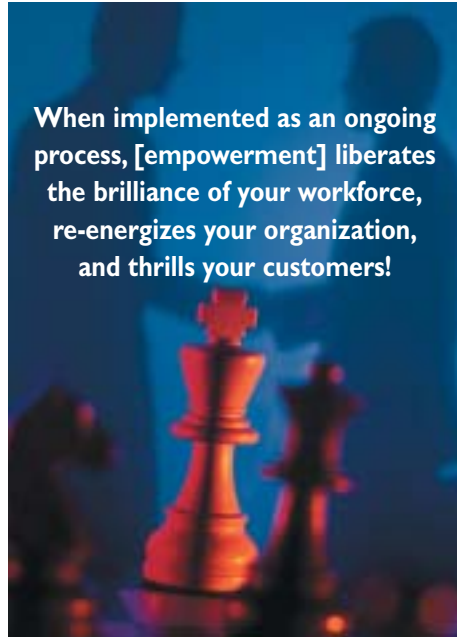
It's hard to be one of the best—it's hard to be great. It takes real effort to be a Nordstrom, a Container Store, a Whole Foods, or a Southwest Airlines. It takes focus, commitment, and discipline to craft a culture that yields consistently positive customer experiences—and consistently profitable returns.

In today's business world, this kind of performance cannot be achieved without empowerment. It's a word that's gotten a bad rap in the last few years as companies without a full understanding of what it really means attempted to push power, without authority, to the front lines. When implemented poorly as a one-time event, empowerment initiatives do more harm than good. When implemented as an ongoing process, it liberates the brilliance of your workforce, re-energizes your organization, and thrills your customers!

In its broadest sense, say Dennis T. Jaffe and Cynthia Scott, authors of *Take This Job and Love It*, empowerment means that “the organization shifts from limiting the power to determine its future and how it will get there to a few top executives, to include every level of the organization in the process.” It takes guts to do this, to create and sustain an empowerment process. It requires courage to look within, challenge old assumptions, and embrace new ideas from people at every level.

Here are ten effective ways to ease into the empowerment process:

1. Define what management means by empowerment. Understand the difference between perceptions and definitions.



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2. Take an honest look at your real values and beliefs (as contrasted with your espoused values and beliefs). Are you walking your talk and talking your walk?

4. Using feedback, determine if most of the workforce will support the effort (if not, stop here). Ask people what they need in order to take the risks associated with empowerment.

4. Revisit your vision, mission, and goals. Make sure they are customer-focused, clear, and understandable to all. Define the words if necessary; what does it mean to be a premier company?

5. Assess current level of skills in the organization, including individual readiness, personal and inter-group relationships, as well as organizational structures and policies.

6. Assess the adequacy of the information system in your company; can it support the effort? People need information to be empowered.

7. Plan ongoing training efforts in interpersonal communication and team skills. These relationship skills are at the hub of any change initiative and can make or break the effort.

8. Work with employees, in teams and individually, to begin the process of challenging old beliefs and assumptions. Look at assumptions about the customers, the marketplace, and your competencies.

9. Together, with their input, make the vision come alive in ways that everyone understands and supports.

10. Create it! Be sure to regularly assess and refine the process and the goals toward which you're working.

Choosing to empower your employees is a bold move. The leadership in a company must have sensitivity, intelligence, and patience, moving the initiative at a pace that respects where employees are now and where they have been. Leadership must be skillful at building and maintaining an environment of trust and emotional safety, enabling everyone to take steady steps forward. ♦

JoAnna Brandi is publisher of the *Customer Care Coach™*, a weekly training program on mastering “The Art and Science of Exquisite Customer Care.” She is the author of *Winning at Customer Retention*, *101 Ways to Keep 'em Happy*, *Keep 'em Loyal* and *Keep 'em Coming Back* and *Building Customer Loyalty—21 Essential Elements in ACTION*. She writes a free e-mail tip on customer caring, which you can sign up to receive at www.customercarecoach.com and www.customerretention.com. She can also be reached at (561) 279-0027.

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