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4 LESSONS IN EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT, COURTESY OF CHICK-FIL-A (<HTTPS://WWW.CSP.COM/CHICK-FIL-A/>)



<https://www.csp.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/chikfila.png>Most

consumer-facing businesses could stand to learn a few things about customer experience and employee engagement from Chick-fil-A.

I recently connected with a friend and colleague of mine, T.J. Hammond, who works in learning and development at Chick-fil-A. I've enjoyed a knowledge-sharing relationship with T.J. for several years based on our shared beliefs in what makes a superior customer experience, especially as it relates to a company's culture.

So I was thrilled when he arranged for me to take a few tours behind the scenes of their Support Center operation and share with me the strategies this quick-service restaurant (QSR) has in place to support their franchisees. **To say I was impressed by what I learned would be an understatement.** If I were going to get into the QSR business, I'd seriously consider Chick-fil-A, because of their attention to detail. No wonder this brand often gets referred to as an example of great customer service. They leave nothing to chance.

Here are just a few things Chick-fil-A gets right about employee engagement and customer experience:

1 – They Put Control of the Experience in the Owners' Hands

Chick-fil-A franchise owners are responsible for everything that happens under their roof, including the service climate unique to that restaurant. Owners hire and train their employees and are in charge of their engagement. And most importantly, each owner has the freedom to do different things for their own staff to make sure they're engaged and motivated. **Instead of "we can't/don't do this or that because it's not Our Way," Chick-fil-A Corporate asks their franchisees, "What do you think will work, and how can we support you?"** Figuring out how to address your own challenges is part of their culture.

Chick-fil-A trusts the people on the ground doing the work, and empowers them to make decisions and try new things based on their own observations. For example, some owners offer tuition assistance as an employee benefit, to help attract the best hires. It's not an organizational mandate, or even a suggestion from on high; it originates with the owners, and the organization makes it happen.

2 – They Encourage Collaboration & Transparency between Franchisees

Chick-fil-A is very transparent with their customer experience data – which they track, across multiple channels, on a daily basis. Rather than pit stores against each other to encourage competition, Chick-fil-A wants its franchisees to feel as though they are all on the same team. They're more than willing to support those efforts with data and enable owners to learn from each other.

For example, let's say a store in one part of the country is struggling with breakfast sales and unsure of how to turn the tide. Chick-fil-A will gladly fly one of its top breakfast performers out to that location to give the owners face time and allow them to coach each other. **They'll invest in these mentor/mentee relationships because they know they'll see a return.**

3 – They Have the Training Chops to Support Employee Excellence

Chick-fil-A's employee training is thorough, customizable, and designed around the behaviors and operational aspects that really matter to customers. Individual owners are encouraged to put their own touches on how they train their teams. At the same time, the materials, resources, and methods supplied by the organization are top notch. For example, they hire actors and run simulations of all kinds of different customer scenarios and challenges. **Their employees are ready for anything, from cleaning the coffee filter to building the perfect sandwich to handling customer grievances.** They also have an excellent New Employee Onboarding process, as well as supporting new franchise owners with a "grand opening" team for weeks to help them get off the ground.

4 – They Value Their Employees

Unusual perks like tuition assistance are just one way that Chick-fil-A treats their employees like people, not just worker bees. **One of the most striking things I noticed during my tour is something I'm not even sure Chick-fil-A realizes is so powerful.** Rather than calling people "managers" and "customer service representatives" and other generic job titles, they use titles like Leader, Influencer, and Stakeholder. These aren't just empty titles handed down through a memo: their practices demonstrate that they really *believe* in these titles and take them seriously.

What Banks (and Others) Can Learn from the Chick-fil-A Model

Chick-fil-A clearly understands the connection between building a customer-centric culture and what that takes from a support standpoint. What can you do today to be more like them?

- **Empower your branch leaders to innovate.** There is a time and a place for brand consistency. That ends when policies and procedures become so inflexible that branch managers feel their hands are tied, or like they can't make suggestions for improvement or change. You'll see a return on innovation if you actively support your managers to think for themselves.
- **Encourage collaboration over competition.** Pool your resources – there's more than enough to go around. Whether within a particular branch or between branches, managers and employees can all stand to benefit from mutual coaching and mentor/mentee relationships.
- **Keep your training engaging and current.** Don't be afraid to stray from the typical corporate training models. Be bold, be memorable, try new things. Be proactive, not reactive, and update your materials and resources regularly. Let employees make suggestions and lead initiatives instead of always handing things down from the top.
- **Give your employees what they want and deserve.** There's more to employee engagement than health insurance and retirement plans. Much more. If you want to attract and retain the top talent, and not just fill empty positions, go above and beyond the bare minimum that employees expect to find anywhere.

Not coincidentally, these are many of the same values and strategies we endorse at CSP. We're proud to support our clients in creating and fostering a superior customer experience based on comprehensive, current customer data. Change isn't easy, but it doesn't have to be hard, either, with the right support and resources.

Jeff Dahms is Vice President of Research & Development at Customer Service Profiles. Jeff has over 12 years of experience managing and consulting to data for both internal and external clients, and has extensive experience in helping Executives focus on key indicators in order to achieve maximum results.

You may also want to read:

- [Manager Development is Manager Empowerment \(https://www.csp.com/manager-development-training-benefits/\)](https://www.csp.com/manager-development-training-benefits/)
- [10 Examples of Employee Engagement in Action \(https://www.csp.com/10-examples-of-employee-engagement-in-action/\)](https://www.csp.com/10-examples-of-employee-engagement-in-action/)
- [CX-ellence: 3 Companies Customers Love \(https://www.csp.com/cxcellence-3-companies-customers-love/\)](https://www.csp.com/cxcellence-3-companies-customers-love/)
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