

C-H-O-I-C-E-S, empowerment and the origin of apparent stupidity

By [Lehan Stemmet](#)

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Sometimes, giving your customers a choice is just not on. Not always for their sake, but for your sake. Also not always for the reasons you think, but also for some reasons that may seem as trivial as the fact that you may seem like a Jack-of-all-Trades... master of none.

I remember a little story someone once told me when I was still a kid. It was meant as a joke, but the truth in this little tale became more and more apparent as I made my way through the corporate, sales, marketing, biotech, politics and so on environments.

A young guy started a sales assistant job at a supermarket. The sales assistant received rigorous sales and product training, but what the training programme failed to teach the new young sales guy was common sense.

As this new sales assistant approached his first target client on the first day after receiving training, his manager followed him and peeked around and between the shelves as the new sales guy helped an old woman.

The young sales guy looked at her and introduced himself... the way he was trained to do. The manager was impressed by the way the sales guy went about going through the steps -1 smile -2 make eye contact -3 introduce yourself -4 ask if and how you may be of assistance.

The lady replied: "Sonny, I'm looking for fine peach jam..." After having a quick look around the shelf, the young sales guy cleared his throat and said: "Aw sorry ma-am, it seems we have no fine peach jam..." And so the lady left the supermarket...

Storming like a raging bull towards the sales guy, the manager says: "Never ever say that again. You always give the customer other alternatives: Sorry ma-am, we don't seem to have fine peach jam, but we do have fine strawberry jam, fig jam and apricot jam. Would you like to try some of that maybe?"

Another customer walked in and the sales guy approached to go through the steps as set out in the manual.

"Yes, uh, I'm looking for toilet paper please," says the customer.

The sales guy looks around, desperately trying to find toilet paper. He finally says to the customer: "Sorry ma-am, we don't have toilet paper, but we do have tracing paper, printing paper, sand paper and confetti... would you like to try some of

that?"

The message is kind of multi-barrelled.

- 1) Choice is not always on... especially if you have specialist knowledge and your client requires some or other specialist service.
- 2) When you decide to train an apprentice, make sure you provide them with knowledge, but also thinking-for-themselves-skills... for some reason the application of knowledge course is always left behind.
- 3) When you give someone a job, also empower them to make a call on the spot... and don't just tell them that they have to make a call and have the authority to make a call, but also that they have the correct and sufficient background knowledge to make that important call.
- 4) The word 'empower' is somewhat taken out of context more often than not. It actually means to give someone the legal right to do something on your behalf. We mostly assume it means to give someone training and skills.
- 5) So, based on point 4 we know now that empower means to legally give someone the right to act on your behalf, but also that we think empower means to teach someone else something.

Both these assumptions are extremely important and to some extent also correct, however, we tend to do either the one or the other. So, we'll train someone to make a call, but not give them the complete right to make a call. Or we will also give someone the right to make a call, but neglect the proper training they need to make a proper call.

ABOUT LEHAN STEMMET

Lehan Stemmet is one of those rare people who studies one thing and ends up doing something else. His brother reckons: Shrinks are mad, Scientists are eccentric, Marketing people are dilly and Authors just completely lost touch with reality... This bloke studied biochemistry, microbiology, psychology and industrial psychology, ended up in marketing and well, got his first book (Deal With It - emotional empowerment) published in the USA.

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