

DELIGHT CUSTOMERS, DELIVER VALUE AND DIFFERENTIATE!

Is your company delivering on its brand promise? Our keynote speaker at **RetailNOW**, Barbara Sanfilippo, suggests you start with your staff.

Promises, Promises

Re-branding has become the buzzword of the day. Companies are clamoring to create a fresh new logo and identity complete with an unforgettable tag line and glossy brochures. What these companies fail to understand is that what truly makes an impact on their business success is not the look of their marketing materials, it's the attitude of their employees. Basically, we all have similar services so your staff must recognize they are the brand!

We continually assure our customers that we are committed to serving them well. While this is certainly commendable, we can't possibly deliver on our brand promise if we don't first get our employees to understand it, live it and believe it.

This is something I've experienced firsthand. Last year I phoned my auto insurance company to discuss a potential claim. Their brand promise emphasizes, "being easy to work with." After three attempts to maneuver my way through a maze of voicemail prompts to reach a live person, I was shuttled between two employees and one supervisor who all made me feel as if I was the one-hundredth customer they had to assist that day. While I felt their brand had broken its promise, I understood that the employees weren't to blame. The culture and spirit of the company was in need of a healthy dose of what I call the "put your people first" mentality.

The Four Seasons Resorts is an excellent example of an organization that consistently delivers on its brand promise and engages all their staff in the customer experience. Nearly everyone you interact with takes ownership and appears genuinely happy to serve you. While their properties are remarkably beautiful and luxurious, it's their dedicated and engaged staff that truly brings their brand alive.

How did they get thousands of associates worldwide to buy-in and commit to their philosophy? Certainly they haven't done it by just mandating service standards, delivering rote training and crossing their fingers, hoping for the best. Clearly, there are high expectations and accountability built into their exceptional service culture.

If you want to get your employees to internalize—and deliver on—your brand promise, you must model it in the way you, yourself, treat your customers and your staff.

Following are three common pitfalls—along with their remedies—that companies make which can subsequently affect customer service and sales:

PITFALL #1: Support departments are disconnected from the customer experience. These are departments, such as accounting, IT or human resources, that serve other employees within a company and are often so removed from the external customer experience that their sense of urgency in responding to their internal customer's requests is low.

Remedies: Have employees in your support departments or a non-revenue generating role visit with their internal customers or fellow workers. Get them to go on client calls with your sales representatives or listen into incoming customer calls. In addition, invite your customers to speak at both support and front-line staff meetings or conferences. Involving your staff can do wonders to revitalize those that feel isolated or complacent.

PITFALL #2: Lack of staff recognition or reward systems that don't work. Too often support staff, call center employees and those in less visible positions feel underappreciated and uninvolved. We may also be incenting people for the wrong behaviors. Our well-intentioned programs and dollars may be ineffective and wasteful. Once that happens, apathy and disengagement begins setting in.

Remedies: Give your customers and other departments the opportunity to recognize your staff for excellent service. Include praising coupons—cards your customers or managers can use to acknowledge good service or work—in your customer newsletter or when mailing statements and invoices. In addition, create a Recognition Tool Kit™ filled with items you, your managers and internal departments can use to recognize top performance. Find ways to create an experience for your employees—something that creates a memory for them.

PITFALL #3: All employees don't have a sales mindset. In today's competitive environment everyone on your team must be a sales ambassador for your firm. Unfortunately, many employees don't understand how they impact the customer experience and revenue generation. As a result they may be missing out on opportunities to help your firm grow.

Remedies: Make sure everyone on your team understands your vision and how they contribute. I'm a big believer in teaching all employees how to get leads and referrals. In addition, even your sales staff can become complacent and miss cross-selling opportunities. Chances are you have past and current inactive or neglected clients that could use additional services and products. Be sure to include goals and rewards to motivate your staff to deepen relationships and retain existing customers.

So at your next meeting ask your team members, "is our brand dead or alive?" If the answer is the former, get started on keeping your brand promise—first in the office and then in the field. I look forward to meeting you at **RetailNOW** next month in Las Vegas! •

Barbara Sanfilippo is an award-winning business and inspirational keynote speaker, consultant, coach and author of Dream Big! What's The Best That Can Happen? HighDefinition People® partners with organizations to create high performing sales teams and engage staff to live the brand promise. To sign up for her learn more, visit: www.HighDefPeople.com



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Barb Sanfilippo of High Definition People® inspires audiences and businesses to act on their highest aspirations, transform old beliefs, enrich customer relationships, increase sales, and experience work and life at the highest level possible—in High Definition!

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