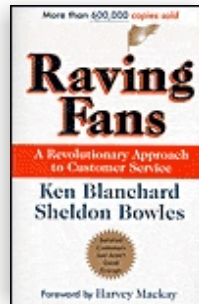




Raving Fans

A Revolutionary Approach To Customer Service



Author: Ken Blanchard & Sheldon Bowles

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■ About the Author



Ken Blanchard

Ken is a gregarious, sought-after and prominent author, speaker and business consultant, A multitude of Fortune 500 companies and fast-growing entrepreneurial enterprises have benefited from his unique approach to managing and developing people.

He has penned nearly a dozen other influential books on management and personal empowerment including: *The Power of Ethical Management*, *Whale Done!*, *The Power of Positive Relationships*, *The One Minute Apology* and his latest, *Full Stream Ahead!*. Blanchard remains at the head of the pack as chairman and chief spiritual officer of the nation's largest training firm, The Ken Blanchard Companies, Inc.



Sheldon Bowles

Sheldon Bowles is a successful entrepreneur, New York Times and Business Week best selling author, and noted speaker. He began his career as a newspaper reporter, became vice president of Royal Canadian Securities, and the president and CEO of Domo Gas. With partner Senator Douglas Everett, he built that company into one of Canada's largest retail gasoline chains. At a time when competitors were going to self-serve, Domo swept to success featuring ;Jump to the Pump; service with gung ho employees.

■ The Big Idea

Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager* and Sheldon Bowles assert that customers have long been neglected and abused by companies that they have developed very low expectations. Despite unfulfilled promises from companies, cold treatment from staff, long waits, and delayed return calls by customer service desks, customers rarely complain and keep coming back to your business, provided your competitors are not doing any better than you.

What businesses need are not "satisfied" customers who will do business with you only until a better competitor comes along. To convert satisfied customers to "raving fans" for your business, you have to **decide** what you want your company to be, **discover** your client's needs and **deliver** consistently on your promises.

"Satisfied" Customers

Customers have awful experiences with companies. Services are so bad that people *expect* bad goods and rude service, flight delays from airlines, late deliveries, lost orders, etc. However, they rarely complain. Check out the for example a restaurant's suggestion box and it's empty. Customer surveys too, say clients are "satisfied".

THREE SECRETS TO “RAVING FANS”

■ Secret No. 1 - Decide What You Want

Remember that you are the source. Create a “vision” of perfection centered on the customer. Imagine the “perfect” service you want to give, the “perfect” bank, law firm, deli, airline etc. for your customers. That perfect vision is your goal.

- Make it easier for customers to do business with you e.g. Advertise discounts, put up information kiosks, use websites and other technologies to help customers shop, etc.
- Make doing business with you a warm and pleasant experience for your customer. Train staff to be attentive, warm, and knowledgeable so customers feel they have good value for their money. Offer free coffee, warm greetings, and clean restrooms. Make customers feel happy to come back for more.
- Think “*how can I not afford*” to do these things instead of “how can I afford to do these” for the customers.

On **deciding** what you want to become for your customer remember to

- Communicate your vision to the rest of you're company, staff or team and to your customers. Tie up your company's bonuses, internal metrics, promotions and performance evaluations with your customer service.
- Look after your employees. Don't expect your employees to look after your customers if you don't look after them. Train them to be “good” to your customers.
- Know when to ignore what customers want. Don't try to give them everything, all at once. It doesn't work. Look after the needs of your customer only within the limits of your vision.
- Focus on constantly achieving your vision.

■ Secret No. 2 - Discover What Your Customers Want

Knowing what you want first helps you understand what your customers want. Imagine an airline wanting to be the best carrier in the whole world and then trying to reach out to flyers around the world without first deciding whether it will be a long haul, international long-haul carrier or a domestic, “no-frills”, low-cost provider.

Know who are your customers. Then, after finding who they are, discover what they want, their vision. Normally, customers focus only on two or three needs. Focus on those needs. Because you know what concerns them, it is easy to match your vision

with theirs.

Listen to your Customers

- Listen to what they say.
- Listen to what they don't say.

Listen closely to what your customers say. First, customers may say one thing but mean another, e.g. clients say they like your low prices but whose actual priorities are on-time deliveries and perfect quality.

Second, listen to your “**silent**” customers. Your service may be so bad that customers feel unwanted; they don't even bother to complain. What's worse, they may leave your company even without any viable competitor to take your place.

Finally, listen to those who say “**Fine**”. Customers have been so accustomed to bad service that they rarely complain, and worse, reply “fine” or “satisfied” even when they mean the soup was cold, the line was too slow and long, etc. They are satisfied because they think nothing will happen anyway if they complain.

Ask your Customers Sincerely

So how do you listen to the customer who isn't talking? Or to the ones who say “Fine” or “Okay”?

- Start asking *sincere* questions. Past experiences have taught customers that chances are, you don't really want to know what they think or feel, that their complaints will be left unheard.
- Win their confidence. Take time to get a conversation going. Customers can sense that you are serious, only then will they open up to you.

A Raving Fan's customer relationship goes beyond your company's product or service. If you don't listen to your customers' thoughts and feelings, you fail to give him what he need because you simply don't know what that is. Furthermore, you reject him as a person, that his thoughts have no value.

More than just a Product of Service

People have needs beyond the need for a product or a service. People need to feel that they belong to a group. People need to feel important. More than just customers and your company, it is actually people and people. You serve your clients. Second, you ask their thoughts and opinions. In other words, you treat them as human beings.

Know When to Ignore

This may sound heretical to great customer service but learn to ignore what customers want if they do not match your vision. Obviously, it would be very difficult

for you to say, design the best sports car if you'd also want it to be the best off-road or family minivan. When it comes to customer service, those who aim and try to be everything for everybody all at the same time, fail.

If your visions do not meet, ask your customer to take his needs somewhere else to be fulfilled.

■ Secret No. 3 - Deliver Plus One

A. Deliver Consistently

Because customers have had bad experiences before it would be very difficult to win them over. Consistency, consistency, consistency is the key. Regardless of what you promise, consistency is the key to turning “satisfied” customers into Raving Fans.

Delivering your product or service consistently time after time without failure is fundamental to Raving Fans customer service. That means observe consistency in perfect quality, timeliness, and results that you promise to deliver. They've been burned before and they will count on you to deliver consistently to win them over.

How to Develop Consistency?

1) Don't commit to the mistake of offering too much service.

Little by little, work on the perfecting on one or two of your visions or promises. Start with a limited number of areas. Better find a small promise that you can consistently deliver than a myriad of services you seldom can meet.

Companies make the mistake of advertising new things even before they can get the old ones right. Airlines for example, promise sets of choice meals however, when you fly, you often find that they often do not have enough of each meal to make sure you get a choice. They also promise to fly one time but lose your luggage. Focus on a small thing, a small service and you can deliver consistently.

2) Put systems in place.

At the heart of every excellent customer service is a network of system. It is the system of people and roles and responsibilities and technology that guarantees delivery not the “smiles” and “good mornings”.

Systems are in place for a predetermined result. Emphasis has to be made on results, that is fulfilling the customers' needs. Systems allow for a minimum level of consistency.

3) Support your system with good training.

Help your people deliver on what you have promised to the customer by putting them through training. If you'd like your staff to be warm, courteous

and attentive, trainings must be conducted to help them become like one.

Systems are useless if you don't put a training system to support it. Any system will be worthless, if people would not be trained to follow it. If you want your waiters for example to be friendly, help train them in exactly what they can do to project a friendly image.

Low-cost airlines too train their flight attendants to clean up after every connecting flight to help reduce the turn-around time for planes. This allows their planes to be in the air in an hour or less instead of sitting in hangars not generating revenue. Second, this reduces the delays for the passengers and because low-cost carriers don't have to maintain cleaning staff they charge less for airfare to passengers.

Finally, congratulate staff when they do well in exceeding customer expectations. Raises and bonuses and employee evaluations can be tied to those who create Raving Fans.

B. Rule of One Percent

Because of tough competition, companies need to keep moving and ensure growth. This would be much easier once you have mastered the art of consistency in delivering on your promises to meet customer needs. What would be unimaginable is if you meet their expectations one time, fall short another and exceed every now and then.

Once you have mastered consistent delivery to meet your client's needs, improve your vision by adding "one percent" at a time. One percent may seem to be insignificant, however, the rule is to improve your vision in small steps to allow you enough time to master consistency in delivering your new as well as existing commitments.

Improve by One Percent A Week, You Improve More than 50%.

If you try to do too much at once, it is likely that you will fail to deliver consistently, at the least you'll feel frustrated or overwhelmed by the enormity of the job ahead. If you improve by one percent each week, you feel confident you can do the job. By end of the year, you have improved your product or service by more than 50%.

Be Flexible.

Why do department stores enforce a two-item limit on the number of clothes to try in the dressing rooms? Why not allow customers to bring as much as they can so they don't have to keep coming back?

Department stores enforce this two-item limit to reduce the risk of shoplifting. However, if stores have exerted effort to guard against one bad shopper, why can't they exert effort to make shopping much more comfortable and easier for the other 999 honest shoppers?

Following continuous one-percent improvement allows you to set a course but not blindly follow it. Customer service can be wrecked by monolithic bureaucracies

impervious to changing conditions and needs.

Flexibility has to do with *what* you need to deliver to your customers. Consistency has to do with *how* it was delivered.

Visions Either Grow or Die!

Your visions for your product or service for the customer either grow or die. And when visions die, customer services also get buried with it. One-percent improvement helps you meet customer expectations on a “real-time” basis. Customers needs and wants change all the time, and so should your vision and your delivery.

Laziness, stupidity, pig-headedness or bull-headedness indicates you do not listen to your customers and their needs. Don't stick to out-dated visions!

One-Percent Not the Same as “Promise Less Than You Deliver”

This is not the same as the marketing idea “promise less than you deliver”. Deliberately lowering your customers' expectations is cheating them of what you can actually deliver. It's like making better basketball players by playing with bigger basketball hoops.

Through ongoing one-percent improvement, you can promise to deliver your customers ONLY when you have mastered consistent delivery before doing one percent more.

Promising to deliver constantly and plus one-percent more is promising less than what is impossible for you do.

Customers rely on you to deliver. It is not wise to spend millions on advertising making multiple promises and failing to consistently deliver to your customers. Customers feel ripped off when they don't get what you promised.

Consistency along side ongoing improvements (by one percent) and the ability to alter your course are keys to developing Raving Fans relationships. Promise more only up to what you can consistently deliver and deliver using the Rule of O