



5 Takeaways from Barbara Burke

1. *Upping the rate of customer satisfaction even one percentage point can be extremely costly.*

2. *Highly successful companies go beyond claiming they are committed to customer satisfaction to being borderline fanatical about it.*

3. *Successful companies are passionate about employee training, a process they believe never ends.*

4. *More companies are replacing employee satisfaction surveys with employee engagement surveys.*

5. *Hay House just bought the rights to publish her book "The Napkin, the Melon & the Monkey" in hardcover and to publish it internationally.*

Barbara Burke has one simple axiom she uses in her consulting business: exceptional customer service can only be achieved if the employees providing the service feel valued and engaged.

In the last 22 years, the Northfield businesswoman has presented her innovative training programs to thousands of customer service representatives, supervisors and team leaders.

Now, her successful book "The Napkin, the Melon & the Monkey" is about to be picked up in hardcover by the internationally renowned Hay House book publishers. Here are some of Burke's thoughts on her business and her book.

Q: You have been described as an internationally known consultant, speaker and author specializing in the people side of customer management. In layman's terms, what does this mean?

A: I work with the people you interact with when you call a company when you have a problem. Primarily, I work with large organizations that have customer service departments. I have been working in this area since 1986, which is when I started my consulting practice. At that time, customer service was sort of a concept. Now, it is the gold standard for most businesses. What we find is the most important piece to providing high customer satisfaction is really the people at the front line of service. I work with the business representatives that answer your phone calls. I help them create a culture that is customer centered but really focused on making the employee feel valued.

Q: Do you find that there are skeptics who don't believe in what you are doing?

A: Because I have been doing this for such a long time, I have a reputation

for getting results. Quite frankly, I don't run into a lot of resistance. Usually, I'm recommended into the organization. And usually, when they call in folks like me, they are in a fair amount of pain.

Q: Your book "The Napkin, the Melon & the Monkey" is in its second printing now. Do you think it has been successful?

A: Yes, it's been an interesting journey. I had some time in 2004 and I wanted to write a story that illustrated the relationship between service representatives and customers at a call center. I wrote the book for service representatives because their chief problem is that they deal with irate customers. They get blamed for everything. Unfortunately, that wears on a person and impacts their attitude and stress level. What I wanted to do with the book is create some emotional space between the service reps and the customer, which allows them to retain the power. The reason I think the book has been wildly successful beyond my dreams is because it has ancient wisdom, it's very readable, it's easy to understand and it has helpful information.

Q: Who do you consider your main competition?

A: I have such a unique space that I don't run into people who do what I do. I have basically just made this up as I've gone along. I didn't have a template in which to work. When I first started doing consulting with customer service, nobody knew anything about customer service. I made my way through and always delivered the goods and it took off from there. My unique contribution is that I really believe in the intelligence and the ability to provide solutions that frontline people have. More companies are trying to keep these people. That's where I fit in.

• Reach Barbara Burke at 507-663-7232, or log onto her Web site: barbaraburke.com

In my 22 years, I've seen the good, the bad and the ugly.