



THE MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

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REVIEWER'S BOOKWATCH: November 2005

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Roger's Bookshelf

Branded Customer Service
Janelle Barlow and Paul Stewart
Berrett-Koehler
ISBN: 1576752984, \$27.95, 259 pages

Highly Readable, Highly Valuable

Here we go again. Yet another book about customer service. Ho hum. "Branded customer service? Branded? Can you brand customer service? Sounds like somebody else has come up with a gimmick for riding the customer service horse yet another mile down that lonesome road called Somebody Pay Attention.

Well, you see the attitude I had as I opened this book to see if there was anything new. Goodness knows we need some fresh ideas to stimulate customer service. Most people in business seem to have forgotten the concept of genuine, caring service - if they ever had it to begin with.

Oops! Hello! Here we have a book that talks about customer service and branding in the same breath. Gee, they're connected! If you don't walk your talk, your brand, then your brand is worthless. Duh. Why don't business managers get that message? Why don't they send that message more strongly to the people who work for them...and their customers?

The authors explain so much in this book. The first section is designed to reach top executives, the influencing decision-makers, with the message of what they have to do and why. The cute explanation in the introduction suggests that after executive readers have completed this first portion of the book, they will be able to

decide if they should move further into action and commitment. When I read that, I thought it would be fun to see how I felt at that decision point in the book. Frankly, I was so captivated, I just kept on reading without missing a beat!

Whatever your background, you'll learn a lot in these pages. Some of your learning will come from the instructional text; some will come from the illustrations. A surprisingly good dose will come from the numerous examples of when companies have been on-brand or off-brand. The answer, to listen carefully to the authors, is to recognize that service is part of your brand - the way you present yourself to your marketplace. That service attitude, and the capacity to bring your brand to life, is a creature of your corporate culture. Oh, yes. Now we're digging in! Indeed!

Prepare to be a bit more engaged than you expected with a book like this. Well-done approach of how material is presented and how their examples turn up the pilot light to get some movement going. It's vitally important to communicate your brand to your people, with an emphasis on how they can bring the brand to life. It has to be done from the inside out. Superficial campaigns to half-hearted training programs won't do it. The message has to roar out from deep inside you and your organization. When it does, there will be no stopping you!

Check out the Tool Box at the end of the book...right before the index. Officially, it's Part III of the book, but it will feel like an appendix that was affixed to help readers apply what they learned to really make the customer service aspect come to life. One idea from this section could pay for the book many times over. And that's why you should buy them in quantity for your key people (and who in your organization is not "key" - and why are they still on your payroll?)

Read this book to discover how to put your company into a fresh new alignment of significance and purpose. You'll probably want to take those books you just bought in quantity and share them with your supervisors and others to help them "get the message."

When people walk your talk because they want to, you'll see dramatic differences.

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