



Book Review



Title of the Book: **'Raving Fans!'**
 Authors of the Book: **Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles**
 Date of Publication: **1993 G. C.**
 Number of Pages: **132**
 Reviewed by: **Selamawit Negasi, Lecturer, SMUC
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'Raving Fans!', written by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, is one of the best-selling books in the field of management. The two writers have co-authored other best-selling books too. They are well known for the books ***Gung Ho*** — whose theme pivots on how to motivate people in any organization; ***Big Bucks*** — how to make you and your company very much lucrative, and ***High Five*** — the magic of working together. On top of this, Blanchard is popular by the book ***The One Minute Manager***, co-authored with Spencer Johnson.

Owing to their extensive and practical experiences of management and issues related to it, the writers have always succeeded in presenting management issues that eventually pay off well when implemented. Besides, what is notable about these writers is their styles of presenting complex issues in a simple way that is easily accessible.

Written in a story form, **'Raving Fans!'** deals with revolutionary

approaches in customer handling service. It is presented with the belief that 'satisfied customers just aren't good enough!' and it declares that businesses should work towards creating raving/enthusiastically praising fans. Hence, anyone who is interested in transforming what is offered to customers (be it product or service) in an attempt to create lasting and admiring users, **'Raving Fans!'** remains just a must read. In order to give a glimpse of what the book is about, because the issues are applicable in customer handling efforts, the major issues are summarized and made accessible here.

The book begins by stating the general fact that quality is the heart of the success of any business whether it is product or service rendering. In line with this, however, it brings into light that quality is one of the most wrongly understood features. It is revealed that this is so because most businesses believe that quality exists when the product matches the needs of customers. According to the authors of this book, nevertheless, such a correspondence is said to reflect only one aspect of customer service. Their discussions reveal that for a business to be in a position to

provide quality there must be an understanding that quality could be achieved at its level best by touching upon all the needs and expectations of customers. It is further explained that the product, ALL the conditions in which the product is made to reach the user and the overall effort the business firm puts forward to satisfy the expectations of the customer must be aligned in accordance with what the customer expects them to be so. Hence, it is underlined that ALL the needs and expectations should be in the state of optimal quality and they should also be, as it is emphasized in the book, the major focus areas in customer service provision. emphasized in the book, the major focus areas in customer service provision.

Due to the prevalent misunderstanding, the book calls for a revolution in customer handling services and at the same time it puts forward certain ways of bringing the revolution into action. As the book describes, this calling stems out from a realization of the poor customer service prevailing in businesses. In fact, the customer service that is in action is described

as below standard and at times discouraging. Customers are said to be in a desperate situation in which they are sometimes forced to have low expectations and opt to other business firms which they think they would fulfill at least their minimal expectations. It is revealed that this is no example of an admiring customer; it is rather, to use the book's description 'a revolt waiting to happen'. Anytime a better service is found to be in action, customers wouldn't hesitate for a second to fly. Contrary to common expectation, it is suggested that businesses should work towards creating not only a satisfied customer but also a customer who is devotee, admiring, long lasting and ultimately a 'raving fan'. It is stressed that creating a raving fan should be the ultimate goal in customer service.

In order to be able to provide a customer service that fulfills all the needs of customers and in turn to be able to create raving fans, the book puts forward three strategies which it calls magic secrets. One of the magic secrets urges that before anything else the business should know what it wants to be and formulate a vision. Once this is done, it is also suggested that the business has to set the vision of perfection centering the customer. What this means is that it is necessary for the business to imagine and visualize all the areas where perfect services could be offered. In addition to this, the business is expected to bring down this imagined perfect vision to reality, find out where the ups and downs are, and continue to work for more improvement.

One of the examples given in the book displays this secret by describing how a small scale, poorly equipped grocery store grew into a big, much favored and all-providing supermarket. When the

business began, it was in a narrow and poorly equipped state where, for example, vegetables in bad condition were sold. This made the owner, a female grocer, to feel uncomfortable and as a result become guilty conscious. Although she had buyers, she didn't want to continue to sell like that and she also knew that someday she would lose all her customers when better competitors come into the scene sooner or later. Therefore, to her own good, she decided that she shouldn't keep on doing the way she had been doing. She made it clear to herself that she wanted to thrive in the market. Besides, she visualized the kind of improved service she liked to offer. She imagined that she would sell fresh and quality products; make the place appealing (spacious, carpeted, and brightly lit); give free side-services (such as coffee house, space for kids to play, free shoe-shining for people who would be in need of, parking for customers' cars etc.); create a welcoming atmosphere (giving a list of new arrivals, advising on buying cheaper and valuable items, avoiding queuing up at the checkout, etc.) and more. Since then, she had worked to bring these into reality step by step and eventually succeeded in establishing the most loved and celebrated supermarket where buyers from all over the places come to, even from far away places traveling miles and miles. The other magic secret states that it is essential for a business to discover what the customer wants. Customers are said to hold their own vision while they go out to do business. Accordingly, the business is expected to find out this vision and see how it could be integrated into the vision of the business. The book asserts that businesses cannot be everything to everyone. As a

result, they have to establish their own vision first and then move on from there to find ways to accommodate the customers' vision.

For a business to be able to discover the customer's vision, it is disclosed that it has to find out who the customers are—the internal and external ones. The manufacturing plant discussed as an example in the book made efforts to know all its customers and found out that its customers were the purchasing agents, the end-users, the workers in the engineering department, the accountants in the plants, the quality control department, etc. It, therefore, included every one of them in the vision so that the plant could be in a position to create raving fans.

The book further elaborated by stressing that after knowing who the customers are, the next step should be to ask to find out what the customers are looking for. In the process, businesses are advised to listen hard to what is said or not said. At times, customers might not trust that their complaints could be taken seriously and put into any value. Thus, some remain silent while others just simply say 'fine'. By taking note of such situations, it is advised that the business should work to listen to the silence and the 'fine' by asking sincere questions and translating the responses into action. The book continues to elaborate that translating into action has a double purpose; firstly, it improves the business and secondly, it creates the ground for customers to build trust.

As the other example presented reveals, the manager of a gasoline station goes everyday to a different store and pumps gas for at least an hour to listen to customers. This example shows, as it is expounded by the writers, that the manager is dedicated to practice the second magic secret. Besides, he is

determined to create raving fans. Still more, he is an example of the fact which holds that 'people who created raving fans have minds of their own.' According to what the book discloses, most managers wouldn't like coming down the ladder to work, for example, alongside the clerk for the benefit of the business. Hence, it follows that it is necessary to be flexible and ingenious to create raving fans as mentioned by Blanchard and Bowles. The discussion on the importance of flexibility leads to the third magic secret, which emphasizes on being flexible. Besides, it extends that businesses have to discover the vision and deliver plus one.

With regard to the discussion of the delivery of the vision, what the book reveals is that businesses are advised to be consistent in their service offering. When in need of improvements, they have to start small and consistently work for more in order to gain the trust of customers. To be consistent, what the book puts forward is the need for having systems of operation that everyone in the business could use as a guideline. The suggestions include that it is necessary to give orientation to new workers; refresher trainings to senior workers and to encourage workers to use their own creativity. It is also suggested that workers should be promoted based on merit and inventiveness.

In the circumstance of working for change and improvement, the

book points out that the usual hurdles are being over-ambitious and less confident. By being over-ambitious, it is explained that managers plan too much to do at once and when that

becomes impossible to achieve, they get discouraged. On the other hand, by planning too much, it is disclosed that managers lose confidence to push ahead. Still more, the danger is said to be that they might conclude it is impossible and, therefore, not necessary to do. However, the book asserts that these problems could be controlled by the magic of one percent. The magic of one percent is explained as an attempt to move forward gradually, tackling problems step-by-step. Instead of trying to tackle everything at once, the advice is that it would be easy to achieve the grand vision by starting with a small area and moving forward and building on it. The saying has it: *Rome is not built overnight.*

In the final analysis, the *book* states that the three secrets might probably be absorbed by change-loving business people as opposed to the ones who might be negatively oriented and, therefore, believe that creating raving fans is extra. However, the authors advise that it is essential to examine long-standing practices and attitudes and work for change and betterment for the sake of customers as well as businesses.

In general, the book propagates that for a business to flourish and provide a successful service that lasts generations after generations, it had better add the human dimension. By considering the human aspect, they have to make people and ALL their needs at the centre of their businesses.

Contrary to the not rewarding view which takes the business' product in a narrow sense and considers customer service as extra, it is asserted that when a customer comes for service, as much as pos-

sible, an effort should be put to treat

A good book is the purest essence of a human soul.

Thomas Carlyle

(1795 - 1881)

properly ALL his or her needs. In fact, the book further asserts that the business should be able to go as far as revolutionizing the needs and expectations of the customer. The book supports this assertion by mentioning the experience of the aforementioned gasoline station.

When the idea of using the names of customers was brought up, some workers contradicted by saying that it was extra and not so important. However, the manager persisted and they began to practice it by asking for credit cards, picking the name from the card, and using it. The manager believed that was one of the ways of creating emotionally comfortable situation and it paid off so. It was also revealed that it played its part in making the gasoline station, among other things, the greatest, and much favored in the US.

On the whole, the book emphasizes that this practice, the practice of putting the human dimension at the centre of the business, which should again be followed by all businesses, gave a human element to the gasoline station. Thereby it is possible to create conducive environment for the prevalence of a revolutionized service rendering with much admired business firms that can survive the tide of poor customer handling because of which so many others fall apart after some shiny period of heydays due to their arrogance to cope up with the necessary changes mentioned herein.

