

Is Your Front Line Engaged in the Battle for Customers?

By [Rick Barrera](#)

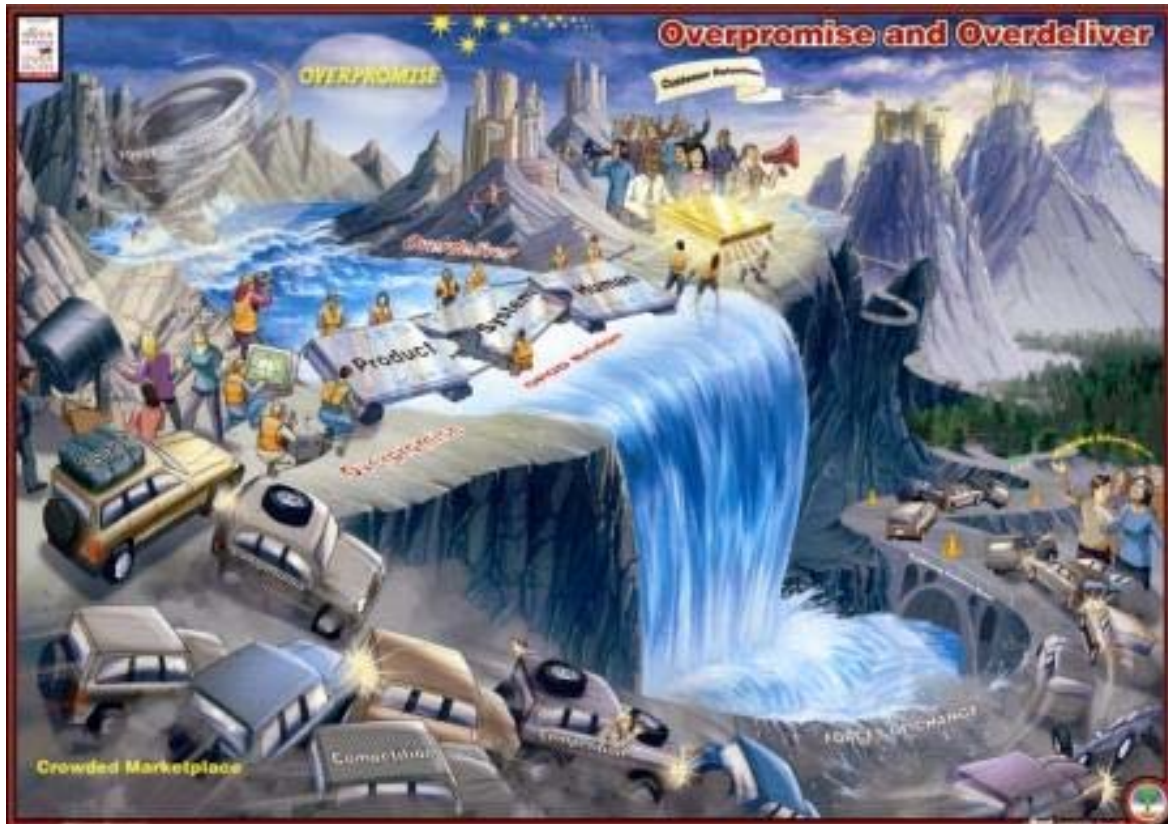
Do your employees know what makes your company radically different from all of your competitors? Do they understand the specific critical role they play in creating customer experiences that are so unique customers can't stop talking about them? Do they know how to talk about your company's products and services in the most powerful way? Is your front line ENGAGED?

If you want your customers to understand how great your company, your brand, your products and services are, your front line must be engaged with customers. What do I mean by customer engagement? I mean that every employee must understand *what makes you different* from your competitors, and they must know how to *talk about* that difference in a powerful way. They must know *what words to use, what stories to tell and how to tell them*. They must know how to engage customers both *mentally* and *physically* to get your customers involved in understanding *how you are radically different from your competitors, why they should buy your products and services* and most importantly, *why they should stay loyal for life*.

Why aren't your employees doing this already? Haven't you TOLD them all these things? Haven't you PUBLISHED all these ideas and examples in the company newsletter? Haven't they HEARD all the speeches at the annual meetings? Haven't they all been through TRAINING?

Of course! But, have you ENGAGED them? Have you asked for their ideas about what should be done to respond to the rapidly shifting marketplace? Have you forced them to confront your competitors' strengths and design a strategy for obliterating them? Have you asked them to reinvent their own personal role in engaging customers in radically different ways to get radically different results?

No matter how often I see it, I am always amazed by the power of engagement. Passive learning simply does not work with today's highly educated workforce. When I deliver my "*Overpromise and Overdeliver*" presentation, the response is always positive, but when we ENGAGE the audience in a workshop using a large visual map of the entire customer journey, EVERYTHING CHANGES.



When confronted with the forces of change facing their industry, they start clamoring for change within their own company to keep pace. When they experience the customer's journey from the customers' point of view, they are often frustrated or even outraged at how difficult they make it for their customers to buy and use their products and services. When confronted with the mis-alignment in their own company, they rapidly engage in realigning their internal processes and communications to deliver a much better customer experience. They quickly realize that with a few simple changes they can engage their customers in a much more compelling way.

Every time I watch the transformation, I am reminded of Jack Welch's experience in the GE locomotive plant in Erie, PA. The plant was scheduled to be shuttered because it could not be cost competitive. When employees found out that they would all lose their jobs, and the plant would be closed, they asked for a stay of execution if they could win a large contract that was up for bid. Management agreed, but made it very clear that their costs were so far out of line with competitors, that winning was highly unlikely. Working in small teams, employees reengineered nearly every aspect of the locomotive's design and the processes used to build it. In a matter of weeks they slashed costs, taking 45% out of the cost of the cab alone. They won the bid and kept the plant open. During the celebration, Jack Welch approached one of the workers and asked one simple question. "Why didn't you do this before?" The answer was also simple. "No one asked us to." What a shame.

During a recent workshop for a builder, employees discussed the problem of homeowner walk-throughs during construction. A homeowner would walk through one week and point out a problem such as a cracked window. When they walked through the next week, they would see that the window had not yet been fixed and feel angry that their concerns were not being addressed. The truth was that a new window had been ordered, but had not yet arrived at the job site. The team decided to have the

homeowner put stickers on each problem as they did the initial walk through. Then the stickers were updated at the end of each day and signed by the employee handling it to show what progress had been made on resolving the issue and who was responsible if there were further questions. That way, when the homeowner walked through, they could SEE the progress being made and feel that their concerns were, in fact, being addressed.

Another startling issue came out of the workshop. One of the landscapers asked why the company didn't build bigger garages for its customers. There were lengthy discussions of costs and square footage, etc. But the landscaper kept pressing the issue. He said he thought it was silly to park a truck in the garage and not be able to close the garage door. Then the whole discussion changed. "What do you mean?" the others asked. "Many of our Colorado customers have horses and drive pickups with extended cabs. The garage is just too short to accommodate its length!" was his answer. Further investigation revealed that the architect of the homes lived in Los Angeles and had never considered such a concern. With this new insight, they were able to offer an "upgraded" garage for their customers at a handsome profit for the company.

How many companies are delivering less than their best simply because they never ENGAGED their employees in making a difference for customers? Don't let yours be one of them. Engage your front line in winning the battle for customers every day!

To learn more about Rick Barrera, his speaking topics, books, etc. please visit his website at www.overpromise.com

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