The book *Raving Fans*, by Kenneth Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, is focused on the importance of customer service and teaches the average person how to create ‘Raving Fans.’ The book is told in a story like format. It has two main characters – Charlie and the Area Manager. The book starts out with a gentleman who has recently been promoted to the Area Manager of a business. He is told that their business was built on customer service and if the others in the position before him had understood that, they would still be there. The Area Manager is assigned the daunting task of fully understanding customer service and bringing that into his department, for the sake of his job.

Now enters Charlie. Charlie is an imaginary character of sorts. He appears out of nowhere wearing sports cloths and carrying a golf bag. He claims to be the Area Manager’s Fairy Godmother. After getting over the initial shock and questioning his sanity, the Area Manager opens up to Charlie. Charlie claims he is going to teach the Area Manager how to create ‘Raving Fans.’ The story continues and amidst their talks and games of golf, Charlie teaches the Area manager the three main strategies or ‘secrets’ for creating Raving Fans: 1) Decide What you Want; 2) Discover What the Customer Wants; 3) Deliver Plus One.

Charlie first starts out by teaching the Area Manager that the only reason his customers are satisfied is because their expectations are so low. He claims the Area Manager’s service slogan should be “No Worse Than the Competition” (Blanchard & Bowles, 1993, p.11). Charlie speaks of how customers are so fed up with the service they receive, that most of the time they don’t even complain. People’s expectations are low and they are too easily satisfied. Charlie takes the Area manager on a series of stops, where he learns about the three strategies. The first stop they make is at Varley’s, a very successful department store. Here, the Area Manager is greeted by a gentleman who is neatly dressed and pins a carnation on his lapel. He also sees that their restrooms are spotless and is helped by a staff member who goes out of their way to get a book the Area Manager wanted. At Varley’s the Area Manager learns the first strategy – Decide What you Want. In order to do this, you must have a vision. Here, Leo Varley, the store owner, presents the Area manager with a bracelet inscribed with ‘Decide What you Want.”
The second stop was Sally’s Market. There, he was greeted with valet parking and shoe shining service. Conveniently, the Area Manager had a list of groceries he needed. Staff quickly assisted him with their computer system is ordering his groceries with the layout of the store in addition to listing sales and nutritional information. The Area Manager found this astounding and he couldn’t be more pleased, another example of great customer service! While at the market, the Area Manager and Charlie met with Sally, the store owner. Sally reiterated the first secret of deciding what you want and creating a vision of perfection “centered on when the customer used the product” (Blanchard & Bowles, 1993, p.49). He then had to evaluate his vision and see what was actually happening in order to find the problems.

The third stop on their journey was a manufacturing plant, where Charlie and the Area Manager sat down with Bill, the Plant Manager. Here, the Area manager learned the third strategy or ‘secret’: Discover What the Customer Wants. The Area manager soon learned the secret to this was discovering what the customer’s vision is and altering his own vision to fill in the gaps. In order to do these things, you must also discover who your customer is, which can turn out to be an extensive list. During the Area Manager’s time with Bill, he also learns to “listen to the music as well as to the lyrics,” (Blanchard & Bowles, 1993, p.60) which means looking beyond what the customer actually says, to what the customer actually wants. For example, when a customer says something is ‘fine’ or they say nothing at all, this should be a sign that there is a problem.

On their final stop, the Area Manager and Charlie end up at a Service Station where they talk with Andrew. Once again, service is impeccable and the Area Manager is very impressed with the quality of staff and services the station provides. The third strategy is revealed: Deliver Plus One. The concept is if you improve your service 1% at a time, over the course of a period, you will have made dramatic progress. This is also based around the idea of systems and consistency. In order to be consistent you must have strategies in place. For example, teaching your staff how to be friendly by learning the names of their customers or asking questions not related to the service at hand.
This story ends with the Area Manager graduating from Charlie’s customer service program. In the end the Area Manager comes to a realization that sums up what he has learned along his journey: It’s all about people. People who have a need and people who fulfill a need - that’s what creating a Raving Fan is all about.

I thought this book was informative but fun. This is a book that I believe almost anyone in the professional world could benefit from. It was interesting as it was told in a story like format, instead of like a text book of customer service. It kept the reader interested as you kept wondering what the next stop would be and what could the next business offer that the prior did not. Not only did it use real life examples – the department store, the grocery store, the service station and the factory, it addressed specific things we can all do to make our businesses better: cleanliness, clothing, greeters, promptness and consistency. It also addressed more abstract subjects like creating a vision, having systems and making improvements bit by bit. As I read the book, I found myself trying to think of ways I could apply these lessons or strategies to my own workplace. This book laid out a step by step guide to creating Raving Fans and asked the questions that a manager would ask.

Charlie is in the predicament that a lot of us are in. We are told to make things better in our workplace, but not being told how to do that or what exactly the problem is. We are assigned the task of figuring this out and sometimes do not even know where to start. Raving Fans helps a manager look at his organization, his staff and its customers. It helps one determine the proper steps to follow to create ‘Raving Fans,’ an essential piece to marketing one’s organization and being successful.

When I first read the title to this book, I wasn’t sure how it would relate to marketing, although I know and hear all the time how important good customer service is. As I read, I found that it absolutely was a marketing tool. To me, one of the easiest and best ways for an organization to market themselves is through great customer service. As to how this book applies to the lessons we have learned thus far in marketing, it has many applications. First of all, a marketing plan is suppose to act as a roadmap to direct an organization in their marketing. This book acts exactly as that – laying out three ‘secrets’ for creating Raving Fans. The marketing management process includes an analysis of where an organization is now and where they want to be – using
objectives, strategies and tactics. The three steps laid out in this book address those things as well – deciding what you want and what the customer wants. This involves envisioning and figuring out one’s objectives. A big part of marketing is research, in particular, using the S.W.O.T analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an organization. The third ‘secret’ presented in this book is ‘Deliver Plus One.’ The idea of this is to determine the business’s weaknesses and work on improving them 1% at a time. This also involves determining what the company’s strengths are currently and where there are opportunities for improvement.

One thing in particular that comes to mind is determining who an organization’s target market is. In the second secret of ‘Discovering What the Customer Wants’ the organization must first determine who their target market is and what that target market wants. Then adjusting the organization’s vision to fit that, to an extent. It may be that a customer’s vision is too far off course and the organization may not choose to adjust their vision. In this case, that customer wouldn’t really be a part of the target market.

Part of marketing is also learning about consumer behavior. One step in a consumer’s decision making process when deciding who to purchase a product/service from is evaluating their experience. Their satisfaction of a product/service is going to depend a great deal on the customer service they receive. Were they made to be a Raving Fan? If so, they will remember that particular business in the future and will most likely tell their friends about it too.

The biggest thing that came to mind when reading Raving Fans, was branding and positioning. A brand is a product that can differentiate itself from other similar products by adding unique elements. If a customer were to have a choice to make between several similar products or services, they would not only go with the product/service they see as the best and most valuable, but one that provides ‘Raving Fan’ service. By providing outstanding customer service a company can set itself apart from the others, thus creating Points of Difference – a favorable thing in comparison with another organization that may provide lousy customer service. When someone thinks of a product or service, I think the first organization that would come to mind would not only be one with a strong image, but one that provided ‘Raving Fan’ service. In providing this
desirable trait, an organization will also establish brand equity and create a top position in the mind of their consumers. This positioning is very important in marketing because when a consumer thinks of their best customer service experience, you want them to think of your business first.

I believe the topics of this book along with its application to marketing can be beneficial for any organization, but particularly a Parks, Recreation, Tourism or Sport organization. The PRTS field is based around service. We are about providing an experience or product that is beneficial to our customer. Whether it is the opportunity to play in a youth baseball league or attend a MLB game. The ultimate goal is to provide a beneficial and positive experience for our customer in a recreational setting. We are not selling a product that is necessary for one’s survival. We are selling a product that PRTS professionals know is important to the health and well being of all individuals. We are proving the opportunity for fun, relaxation, physical and mental well being. With that said, a consumer may put more thought into where they will put their money than they would for something they ‘have’ to have. That makes the marketing aspect of a PRTS organization very important as there is a lot of competition out there for someone’s disposable income. Personally, if I am going to spend the extra money I have on something recreational, I am going to go somewhere that not only has a great product, but great service too. They go hand in hand. So it’s not only important to have a great product, or to have a great tag line or mission statement, but as part of their marketing plan have a piece that address how to create ‘Raving Fans’ of all your customers.

In order to having ‘Raving Fans’ you must start with a vision. In marketing, you must also have a vision of how you want your company perceived. You have to ‘deliver plus one’ – always striving to set yourself apart from the competition, the ultimate goals of branding and creating points of difference in the consumer’s eye.
References