

1to1[®] magazine

The 2008
1to1 Customer
Champions



The Look of Customer Centricity

Liliahn Johnson
Director of Fan Development
National Basketball Association

You could call Liliahn Johnson a ringer for the National Basketball Association. When the NBA decided it needed retention programs for its teams' season ticket holders and premium fans, it tapped Johnson, who was working at the Four Seasons, to head up its fan development program. Prior to that, her experience in hotels, and from working for Disney, prepared her for the pressures of dealing with sports fans, professional basketball players, and 30 very different team personalities.

"Right now my focus is on fan research, training teams to use service as a differentiator, and in-market strategy sessions,"

Johnson says. "When we go out to visit teams, we try to think like season ticket holders and look for opportunities to customize their experience to increase loyalty. I love coming up with game-changing ideas when we're brainstorming and strategizing."

One of the strategies she's implemented across the organization is using analytics to drive initiatives. She wants to turn sports from an intuitive business to one where data and strategy are the keys to decisions. "We've tried to turn the art of conversation into a science so we can optimize our fan interactions better," she says. "We even created a decision tree around the ideal conversation so our teams could see what the perfect set of touchpoint messaging looks like."

She wants all fans to feel like their favorite team is anticipating their needs in a way other sports franchises can't because they don't know the fans as well. "You create evangelists by connecting with your fans and understanding what's important to them," she says.

To that end, she's encouraged each franchise to embrace arena staff when making decisions that affect the season-ticket renewal process. She tells team executives that while they may see a fan four or five times during a season, the ushers, parking attendants, and ticket takers will see a fan 44 times each year.

She also realizes the importance of putting as many fans as possible

into the arena on game night. It's the experience of being at an NBA game in their hometown that excites most fans. "At the end of the day," Johnson says, "for most fans it's about the games. However, we also want to provide a world-class customer experience." > *Jeremy Nedelka*

"You need to have empathy and the ability to put yourself in the fans' shoes and speak to them in a way that resonates."



ONLINE EXTRA: Want to learn more about the Champions?

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