



SEMINARS

FARWEST

PORTLAND 2022

Tailored to today's customers

Retail expert Anne Obarski explains how to fine tune your business for success

BY HEATHER CYRUS

THE SEMINARS AT FARWEST this year will feature industry experts from across the globe sharing knowledge with attendees on a wide range of topics. We are thrilled to have Anne Obarski, a long-time favorite professional speaker, join us this year to share her wisdom from more than 30 years as a retail strategist and coach.

Anne has been a professional member of the National Speakers Association since 1996 and has served and chaired the

Ethics Committee at the national level. She has been president of the NSA Pittsburgh Chapter and on the board of the NSA St. Louis and Ohio chapters over the past 18 years. Anne works with small to mid-sized businesses and professional associations to offer DISC assessment tools for better hiring and managing results.

We spoke with Anne recently to provide a sneak-peek into her three Farwest seminars for 2022 and beyond.

Anne, tell me a little about yourself and your background.

A few past roles have led me to where I am today. I was a sportswear buyer for a million-dollar department for the May Co. Department Stores (now Macy's), a college business instructor, then a retail consultant, which led me to my speaking career. These experiences have helped me to bring real-life experiences and advice to the thousands of audience members and Fortune 500s that have heard me speak for three decades now.

I always say that making a positive, lasting impression on every customer has never been more important in today's world. Serving customers can be a joy ... and then again, sometimes it's not! I'm here to help you lean toward the "joy" side.

As founder of Merchandise Concepts, my Retail Snoops™ program consists of extensive research regarding all aspects of customer service. My team has gathered priceless research mystery shopping more than 2000 U.S. stores and businesses.

There is a new generation of plant lovers to embrace. What should businesses be doing to ensure they foster the relationship of this younger generation to become life-long consumers in the industry?

This group demands efficiency in purchasing. Products must be online and available as soon as possible in a store. It's

important to provide true success education so that young consumers can be successful in whatever new area they are trying. If its succulents, or creating a food-to-table garden for their family, time of involvement through to the success of the process is critical. Offering online lessons or in-store cooking and planting classes will set you apart from the competition.

What are you most excited about heading into the future?

One of the trends that will be at the forefront is the "friction free" environment where one adapts technology to make all touchpoints in a business more efficient. Customers don't want to hear you are out of stock, a shipment is late, or you don't carry it online. Technology will be a key area to pick up the pace for all of us.

What keeps you up at night?

I don't like to spend time on pricing, but this is an area of concern for all of us. We are living in inflation and people are more careful about how they are spending money. I would hate to see the green industry pull back on its pricing strategies to discover there is nothing left at the bottom line. I suggest pricing competitively, and price for the value the customer is getting.

Make sure you have trained your employees on the selling skills that will remove any doubt in the customer's minds

about their potential purchase. As a customer, I just want to make sure I am using my money wisely and will get a return on my investment.

Pricing also goes along with inventory control, another industry worry. Knowing what is selling, from whom, what the turnover is, reorder possibilities, and performance ratings on every single vendor will help to run a well-oiled machine. You want to avoid the trap of, "a little of this and a little of that." Be ruthless in carrying high-performance inventory that sells well at a good markup.

What kind of tips can the audience expect to learn when you present the "Be an Undercover Boss" seminar (8:30-9:30 a.m., August 24) at Farwest?

I like to ask folks, "If you became a frontline employee for your business, what do you think you might find that could be changed or improved?"

Everyone loves the "Undercover Boss" television show and there are several reasons. Some like that the boss can catch employees doing things wrong, some people love that the boss is finding out just how hard people work, and lastly, we all like to see people rewarded at the end.

This session has a very important quiz that will allow managers to grade themselves in areas that employees



Anne Obarski is one of three dozen amazing speakers offered at Farwest 2022. Be sure to sign up for an education pass when registering for Farwest at www.FarwestShow.com/register.

think are important for their success working for a store.

At Farwest, you will be presenting the "Be an A.C.E." seminar (12:30-1:30 p.m on August 24.) Can you tell us about one of the steps you will be sharing with the audience?

This session allows you to see your entire business through the eyes of your customer. From driving into the parking lot through their entire store journey; what your customer sees or is not seeing is critical for the growth of a business.

One of the most beneficial aspects of this seminar-workshop is the quiz. This is something a business owner of any industry can use. The quiz is divided into sections of the business that allows for goal implementation. Employees fill out the quiz, allowing for management to drill down on the top

one to three areas to put energy into. It is a great way to get everyone involved and keep those eyes open to what the customers are experiencing every day.

You will be presenting the "Be On the Floor: A Merchandising GPS for Your Garden Center" seminar (8:30-9:30 a.m., August 25). Can you give us a sneak peek into this session?

As customers return to physical stores, it's the eye-catching displays that grab their attention and drive revenue. Everyone got comfortable buying online, but now you have them on your stage again.

This session has a strategic focus on what the customer sees and experiences in the store. Powerful and impactful merchandising doesn't just happen, it is an art form that will stop customers in their journey in your store and hopefully encourage them to

look, touch, and buy.

I use a lot of pictures from garden centers across the country in this presentation to show examples of what to do correctly, both outside and inside a garden center to make it a must-visit location.

With life slowly returning to normal, what advice do you have for business owners moving forward?

Labor shortage issues are an ongoing problem. Businesses must work harder to attract, train, and keep good employees, as well as always be on the lookout for new employees. Statistics show that one out of three employees is looking for a new job, they just haven't told their employer yet. This is still a challenge and one that causes concern as garden centers don't have a huge budget for employees whose positions can be long hours and require physical labor. ☺



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