

Profiles of Excellence

Barbara Sanfilippo Believes in Fairy Tales



By Leslie Swiedom
Atlanta Arrangements Inc.

Once upon a time there lived a charming little girl named Barbara Sanfilippo. This little girl beamed as Snow White in her grammar school play and relished every opportunity for "show and tell." As Barbara grew into a fair maiden, she dreamed about work that would make her whistle and about a valiant prince who would share her castle. This fair maiden Barbara wrote her own fairy tale, and then she made it come true. Now Barbara travels throughout the kingdom sharing wisdom, and she's living happily ever after.

Barbara Sanfilippo, CSP, CPAE, made a splash as the opening keynote speaker at GaMPI's Meetings Exploration Conference on March 25. She captivated the audience with "Dream Big! What's the Best That Can Happen?" It's a speaking topic that has grown out of her

own experiences and it continues to drive her in all areas of her life.

"I was always a ham," says Sanfilippo. Active in the high school drama club, Sanfilippo's outgoing personality later led her to success in sales at Bank of America, where she served as Vice President. She describes her career in banking as "very corporate," but admits that she always thrived on being in front of other people and felt natural "motivating the troops." Barbara was an obvious choice to emcee the bank's sales conference. At this point, she did not think of speaking as a profession. In fact, she had never even seen a professional speaker before. For the sales conference, the company had also hired a high-priced professional motivational speaker. Witnessing a presentation like this for the very first time was a revelation. "You mean they pay people to speak?" Barbara recalls incredulously. Public speaking suddenly hit her radar screen. Sanfilippo marks that sales conference, and specifically reading her evaluations, as a turning point in her career. The evaluations enthusiastically praised her, and some even noted, "You were just as good, if not better, than the motivational speaker."

At that turning point, Sanfilippo created one of the tenets of what would later become "Dream Big!" She said to herself, "I am now enjoying a career as a nationally and internationally known speaker and author. Most people think of this as a daydream," says Sanfilippo. She actually wrote this dream out, as if she was already experiencing it. Then she did everything she could to make it real.

Creating a dream board also helped her visualize her dreams coming true. "I cut out a picture from a magazine of a woman who



Barbara Sanfilippo, 2004 GaMPI M.E.C. keynote speaker.

looked successful. She had dark hair, like me, and wore an evening gown,” says Sanfilippo. “I imagined she had lots of business with speaking, sales and leadership.”

What happened next defied all reasonable expectations. In just three months time, Barbara became a member of the National Speakers Bureau and landed a job as the keynote speaker for the American Bankers Association’s national conference. This level of accomplishment was unprecedented for a speaker right out of the box.

With her background in banking and proven success in sales, Sanfilippo was, and continues to be, an obvious fit for companies seeking an on-target business booster. She made a name for herself with topics like “Outclass Your Competition with Five-Star Service” and “Winning Sales Strategies of Top Performers: The Critical Edge.” These hard-hitting corporate presentations rocketed Sanfilippo on to the speakers circuit, but she saw the juicy motivational gigs continuously eluding her.

Informally, Sanfilippo had started sharing her own path to success with people and helping them take steps towards their own dreams. She bumped this idea up a notch and re-positioned herself with “Dream Big! What’s the Best That Can Happen?” This motivational topic rounded out her repertoire and sent her speaking career into overdrive.

Sanfilippo has been a featured speaker at innumerable association and corporate conferences and incentive meetings. Her clients span a spectrum of industries, including Hewlett-Packard, Sharp Health Care, ASAE, Bank of America, National Association of Realtors, and of course, Meeting Professionals International. Notably, Sanfilippo is one of only 85 speakers worldwide to have received both the Certified Speaking Professional designation and the CPAE, Speaker Hall of Fame Award from the National Speakers Association.

Speaking was only part of the dream, though. Remember she also proclaimed herself an author, so naturally she is one. Sanfilippo

authored a book on her uplifting credo, “Dream Big! What the Best That Can Happen?” and also was a contributing author to “The Service Path: Your Roadmap for Building Strong Customer Loyalty.” Barbara also has numerous audio and compact disc products to her credit, as well as a consulting and training company with her husband, Bob Romano called Romano & Sanfilippo, based in San Diego.

Sanfilippo’s husband and business partner, Bob Romano, is the prince Sanfilippo dreamed about so long ago. This dream was not unlike those she had for her career. She put into practice the “as if” principle and acted as if her dream was already coming.

“It’s important to write out your dream in the present tense and make a dream board,” she says, emphasizing how inexplicably powerful this can be. “When I was single, I wrote down, ‘I am with my love and life mate,’” says Sanfilippo.

Still without her prince, but believing he was on the way, Sanfilippo bought a new home, complete with a his-and-hers-style master bathroom that featured two closets and two sets of drawers under the sinks. After unpacking her belongings, she anxiously showed her friends



Barbara Sanfilippo, CSP, CPAE
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Big Response from Sanfilippo’s “Dream Big” Keynote

“When I saw her quote, ‘Whatever you’re dreaming, it’s not big enough!’ I just paused and thought, wow, how true. I should consider that, and now! Why not dream for bigger things? You don’t know your true potential if you don’t try — an old cliché, but a good one! Barbara’s presentation guided me to stop and take time to write down what happiness and success look like in today’s fast-paced, task-jumbled lifestyle that we corporate Americans lead. Using tools such as her ‘Dream Board’ and taking in ‘cappuccino moments’ allows you to refresh your life map!”

— Eric Decker, Atlanta Marriott Marquis

“Barbara Sanfilippo was very inspirational. What she said made me look past what’s going on just in the moment. It made me think about life and re-assess it. In this business we hear a lot of speakers, but she struck a nerve. She was uplifting.”

— J.R. Blankenship, Divine Events



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how she had settled into her new home. Sanfilippo's friends asked her, of course, why she had only filled one of the closets and one of the sets of drawers. After all, she lived alone. Without a moment's hesitation, Sanfilippo answered, "he'll need a place to put his things." Sanfilippo knew her husband would soon arrive, so naturally, he did. The same held true for her personal goals as it did for her professional goals.

Sanfilippo finds immense satisfaction in helping others and sees amazing possibilities in human potential. "I can't explain how it works," she said. "Nothing happens until you step out and make it happen. It is a showing of faith that is powerful."

Sanfilippo has faith in herself, and she has become the heroine of her own fairy tale. For her, it is a simple philosophy — "Always expect the best, and you'll be sure to get it!" With this advice, we'll all live happily ever after. ○



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