

9 Tools for Nurturing a High Performance Team!

by [Desi Williamson](#)

If someone would have told me just three years ago I would be in the restaurant business, I would have told them they need their head examined. After growing up in the business (my dad owned a restaurant and nightclub for 33 years) I thought I had had my fill. Many times, I thought about the prospect of owning a restaurant because I love to cook, but that's a far cry from the responsibility of feeding a hungry public.

As a speaker, I often talk about the subject of niches - how to identify underserved or un-served markets and fill them. When I looked at the restaurant business in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, I discovered there were many such markets. I immediately reverted back to what I had been teaching audiences and the six most powerful questions in business or life: Who? What? When? Where? How? & Why? My hall-of-fame question of, "How could I do it better?" kept me up late at night.

Minneapolis is dominated by major restaurant chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, etc., but it lacked tremendously in the specialty markets like Barbecue. My curiosity compelled me to look at hamburger concepts, so much so I applied and was approved, but in a tight economy, would the public be willing to pay \$7 for a hamburger. I was also approved by a fried chicken franchise, but couldn't escape the uneasiness that people could easily fry chicken in the comfort of their own home. Opening a restaurant franchise is a heavy investment and you can't afford to be wrong! I wanted something people could not easily duplicate in their own homes and would differentiate us from the pack.

Then one lazy Summer afternoon, I heard about a food show at the Minneapolis Convention Center on a local TV station. I immediately summoned my partner and we casually strolled passed each booth with little or no interest. Finally a booth with a sign above it read "Dickey's Barbecue" and a back slapping representative named Tom Petska summoned us inside. Fast forward two years later...and I'm the proud owner of three restaurants, with a fourth due to open in August 2011!



The old adage turned out to be true. We found a niche and filled it. For more than 20 years, the only serious Barbecue could be found at Famous Dave's, a full-service, sit down restaurant. Famous Dave's dominated the market with little or no opposition and this became our biggest advantage. Their meats are grilled and ours are slow smoked overnight. Dickey's Barbecue is a quick serve restaurant with 9 different kinds of smoked meats, 11 side items, desserts, free pickles and ice cream. By the time a customer goes to our competitor, sits down, waits to be served, and tips the help, they can be through our move with the food and buy an entire meal for the tip. "Move with the food" is a

concept that made Chipotle famous. You go in, order your meat which is chopped fresh right in front of you, move down a couple of feet to order your side items, a few more for your beverage and dessert, pay, sit down and enjoy our great food. Unlike most fast food restaurants, we sell real food fast!

The fact that each of our stores is within two miles of a Famous Dave's is something we don't fear. We revel in it because it makes the comparison even more obvious between the cost of dining at their establishment and our value proposition. As I mentioned, so far we've opened three restaurants...but that's not the most important part of the story...it's *how* we did it!

Going Against the Grain

While many franchisees invest hundreds of thousands of dollars, we were able to open our restaurants for a fraction of the cost. How? We found niches!

Starbucks is known for being one of the most successful franchise concepts in history. They are also known for having the very best "A Sites". They're usually located on what's known as "end caps" in high traffic areas. A few years ago, Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz, saw the impending disaster coming in the economy and decided to close 600 Starbucks locations throughout the country to get ahead of the curve. They closed 37 stores in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area alone. Rather than build restaurants from the ground up, we decided to simply take over closed Starbucks locations, which we knew were great sites, and retro-fit the Dickey's concept, which required some slight modifications internally, new signage and we were able to get the landlords to front us the money, in what's known as "Tenant Improvement Dollars." Our cost structure allowed us to be profitable from day one, because we invested a third of what it cost most franchisees. (Believe me, I thank Starbucks every time I walk through their doors!)

Impact!! Restaurant Group, LLC is now one of the fastest growing within the Dickey's system. However, the thing that has made us the most successful is the fact that we have great people. We now have more than 100 employees on our team.

I believe whether you're a multi-national corporation or a small enterprise, the ability to localize your business in today's marketplace is a key component to success.

When you "Act Local", you are able to give the community in which you operate a feeling that the place was built just for them. This also requires a group of dedicated people who are committed to providing a great experience for your clientele. Our goal is for every guest to be greeted with our standard, "Good afternoon, welcome to Dickey's!" During their stay they are asked, "How's your food tasting today?" Before they leave, we tell them "Thanks for coming!" Each day our leadership team is focused on making sure we perform with consistency because within that resides our profits.



Below are some of the keys that have allowed us to grow in an environment that's supposedly the worst in decades to start a business, especially a restaurant:

- 1.) **Establish Your People Profile** - What kind of people are you looking for? It's important to have a profile of the qualities of the people you want on your team and hire to that standard. Even with the best screening process, a few may slip through the cracks, but your standard is always your guiding force.
- 2.) **Share the Vision** - Let people know exactly what's expected of them and how their performance affects the bigger picture. We share our corporate goals, sales, cost and profit numbers with our team, so they know exactly where we stand and why performing to standards is imperative.
- 3.) **Provide Consistent Feedback** - Make sure to provide positive feedback whenever possible and when desired results are not achieved, remember to be hard on the problem, but soft on the person. This is where coaching opportunities arise.
- 4.) **Ask for Feedback** - Prolific leaders understand that some of the best ideas come from people who are closest to the customer. Ask your team, "How am I doing as your leader?" What barriers can I remove and resources can I provide to help us better serve our guest and help you reach your potential?
- 5.) **Provide a Learning Environment for New Skills** - Cross train whenever possible to help your team gain new insight, skills, and an appreciation for other functions of the business. This will allow your business to gain greater cooperation and bench strength, as you expand your enterprise.
- 6.) **Empower Your People** - Once people have been properly trained, give them the latitude to act within their area of competence in order to better serve your customers. When mistakes are made, provide coaching so that better decisions are made when you aren't there and new leaders are developed.
- 7.) **Show Real Interest in People** - One of the best ways to gain commitment from people is to find out what interests them personally and show them how working with your organization can help them achieve it.
- 8.) **Reward Success** - Make sure to acknowledge and reward desired performance, even when successes are small. Now that we have three units, we are conducting contests between the stores regarding our key measures and reward the stores that perform best. This creates a fun environment where team members rally to compete. One of the most powerful predictors of future success is past achievement.
- 9.) **Create a Compelling Workplace** - Lighten up! Provide an environment where people can enjoy coming to work and the process of high achievement. This will ensure an authentic commitment, rather than just compliance.

Regardless of circumstances or conditions, there will be many success stories written over the coming months and years.



The organizations that succeed will extract opportunities from what appears to be dire situations and continue to find ways to fill niches in un-served or under-served markets. Remember to "Act Local" and build a great team dedicated to providing the ultimate customer experience.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY!

For other articles and news features by Desi Williamson, please visit this link:
<http://blog.speakersoffice.com/speakersoffice-blog/?Tag=Desi+Williamson>