

Service That Rocks - By Ron Knight

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What makes a twelve-dollar hamburger worth twelve dollars? Hint: It's not just the Certified Angus Beef.

To differentiate yourself in the restaurant business-and make that burger worth the price-you have to be innovative, creative, irreverent and unpredictable. At least that's what works at Hard Rock Café, where customers don't just pay for those twelve-dollar burgers, they line up for the privilege. And while you may not be able to attract guests with a giant electric guitar or an original Beatles concert poster, you can implement some of the same best practices that have made the Hard Rock's culture of service so irresistible.

When Peter Morton and Isaak Tigrett opened the first Hard Rock Café in 1971, their vision was to offer hospitality unparalleled in the industry. A lot has changed since then: the menu, the music, even the memorabilia. What hasn't changed is the Hard Rock's 'unbelievable guest obsession'-or the eight best practices that keep that obsession alive in every restaurant, every day.

- 1. Train employees in the language in which they dream.** Respect for individuals means respecting the ways in which they learn. Variety is the key: offer training in multiple languages, through multiple medium. At the Hard Rock, most training is delivered 'comic-book style,' with fewer words, more pictures and a healthy dose of humor.
- 2. Assist your staff in creating a volunteer philanthropy group.** Make sure your mottos are more than just words on a wall. At the Hard Rock, the phrase 'Love All - Serve All' represents an absolute commitment to making the world a better place. A unique volunteer program is created at each café, and the employees drive the process. As a result, they are more determined in their efforts-and more loyal to the company that helps them make a difference.
- 3. Enforce standards, but give out 'permission slips.'** Fundamentals are important: the right people need to be in the right positions with the right training, and technical standards must be met. But truly individualized service is delivered by individuals. Give employees the freedom to be the people you hired.
- 4. Hire only 'rock stars'-and treat them like volunteers.** The expression 'hire for personality, train for skill' is popular for a reason: Unique experiences are created by unique people. And to get the best performance out of those unique people, treat them with the same courtesy and respect you'd show a workforce of volunteers-and they'll pass that behavior on to your guests.
- 5. Realize that people will only repeat what they like.** If guests paid a cover charge to enter your restaurant, would you treat them differently? Would you welcome them more warmly and talk with them at every opportunity, rather than just when you're serving them food? This is how Hard Rock employees are trained to think about guests-and it shows in every interaction.
- 6. Earn mental 'shelf space' by creating positive experiences.** Guests rate us on a REX scale: reality versus expectations. To earn a positive rating, we have to exceed expectations. And since guests have so many choices (and such short memories), we have to earn positive ratings every time, with every guest, to stay top-of-mind.
- 7. Treat every customer like a guest in your home, your company's CEO or a first date.** When the CEO eats dinner in your restaurant, do your cooks make absolutely certain his or her order is perfect? Do servers execute every step of the sequence of service? Do managers stop by the table for authentic, personalized conversation? Now imagine what would happen if every guest were treated this way.
- 8. Do what you say you will do.** Companies with integrity have employees with integrity. Deliver on your promises to employees, and they will deliver on your promises to guests. At the Hard Rock, that 'promise' is the same as it was in 1971: an unparalleled guest experience. What promise does your company make?

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