



THE RENEGADE LEADER

What makes a great restaurant? The executives, managers and staff of the T-BONES & CACTUS JACK'S chains discovered that they each defined greatness differently—which made it impossible to reach their goal. Debora McLaughlin's leadership training institute and culture day helped everyone find the same path to success.

Case Study: Great NH Restaurants

by Sharon Bailly, TWP Marketing & Technical Communications

“Our management team needed trust and courage. You can't create that with an email. . . . Debora fulfilled a lifelong dream of mine of bringing my company closer together and accomplishing more than they ever thought possible.”

Tom Boucher,
CEO,
Great NH Restaurants

“For a company to prosper, everyone who works there has to be engaged.” Debora McLaughlin, founder of The Renegade Leader, explains the difficulties companies encounter when they try to motivate their staff and managers. “If the company values respect, for example, management can hire, reward and promote employees who demonstrate the behaviors behind respect. But what behaviors demonstrate respect? Is it in the language employees use? Does it flow in one direction only, from staff toward managers? What happens if some employees are disrespectful but also the best at their jobs? When no one is sure which values are most important and how they're rewarded, everyone becomes frustrated. Teamwork is impossible.”

Great New Hampshire Restaurants, owners of the T-BONES and CACTUS JACK'S chains, were stunned when a company survey revealed that managers felt excluded from decision making and that everyone was confused about the company's values and culture. As CEO Tom Boucher relates, “The executive team thought that managers felt more connected to the company than they were. Some of our leaders were hired 25 years ago. They were dictatorial, but ran a tight organization. Our newer leaders were transparent and also more relaxed. Our most recent hires were caught in the middle and didn't know which way to go. We needed the past and we needed to let go of the past—we didn't have a solid foundation for everyone to grab onto.”

McLaughlin has two proven programs—leadership training initiative (LTI) and culture day—that helps executives, managers and employees create a solid foundation together. These programs:

- Show managers how employee engagement is directly related to the bottom line and their own success.
- Give managers the skills to lead today's employees in meeting the demands of today's companies.

“The leadership training initiative with Debora was the best thing our company has done in 10 years.”

Don Fraser,
COO,
Great NH Restaurants

- Define the desired company culture, so that everyone knows what behaviors are valued and how they will be rewarded.

“Most of our managers had no formal training in management or leadership,” says Boucher. “They struggled to lead employees because they were never given the tools.”

The LTI program provides two days of customized training in communication, coaching skills, role playing and leadership development. McLaughlin notes, “Before the program starts, I meet with managers to find out about their specific challenges, whether it’s dealing with difficult employees or gaining recognition for themselves. LTI gives them new tools and new perspectives.”

The culture day focuses on executives and managers. They discuss the values most important to the company and what behaviors they would expect from employees consistent with those values. “We cook up a unified culture,” says McLaughlin. In addition, at Great NH Restaurants, McLaughlin’s work prompted the creation of a company intranet—a virtual community called “Staff Matters,” where everyone can find the latest information, share ideas, respond to questions and keep connected whether at the beginning or end of their shift or during a moment’s downtime, wherever they might be.

“It would have been more difficult to roll out our intranet before the training,” says Boucher, “because no one would have understood the need for it. Now they understand that the executive team can’t personally visit seven restaurants as often as we used to visit four restaurants. We’re growing and we need a new way to communicate.”

Boucher began noticing results immediately following the LTI program and the culture day. His managers seemed more confident. They were more open to hearing what the executive team had to say, and the executive team began to recognize what managers were doing right, rather than focusing on problems alone.

He credits McLaughlin with helping his staff re-discover their own passion for the restaurant business. “Debora is very smart. We have a lot of work still to do, and she will be helping with that. With her help, this company is going to do great things.”



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