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01/12/2016

CEO Blog - Thought Leadership: Inspiring Leadership and Great Chicken

Last week I enjoyed lunch with two inspiring leaders – Dan Ponton is president of Roosters and Nicole Cox is their director of marketing and public relations.

ORA Director of Communications, Natalie Walston, is writing a profile about Roosters for an upcoming edition of *a la carte* magazine, so she asked me to join them for the interview. This was a very good decision.

The food was outstanding at the “fun, casual joint” as they call it at Roosters. We enjoyed a variety of items with a spotlight on chicken, of course. The fresh, high-quality wings were outstanding and the Carolina Gold sauce was ridiculously good! The service was A+ and all of the staff were friendly, smiling and focused on customers.

Natalie’s *a la carte* magazine story will cover many points about Roosters, which is based in Columbus and has more than 30 locations, but what grabbed my attention was Dan and Nicole’s discussion about people. Dan shared with us that very few people in leadership at Roosters are hired from the outside. He could recall only two. Instead, Roosters hires great people to work in their restaurants and promotes from within.



This is a core trait examined in the “Good to Great” book by Jim Collins (which I discussed in my January 11th CEO blog). Studies indicate firms that hire great people, train them, incentivize them fairly, instill excellent values and grow them in the organization perform the best over time. In the restaurant business, we add the important elements of hiring people who are naturally friendly, outgoing, positive and committed to customer service.

At the Roosters’ location at Henderson Road, I met many employees who fit this profile. Additionally, Roosters’ founders Bob & Corrine Frick say on their website: “Our mission is the dedication to providing a fun, casual atmosphere for our employees and guests. Honesty, integrity, dependability and personality are the cornerstones to the foundation of our business. We are committed to the service of our guests and to the growth of our employees.”

This vision is first class and illustrates the importance of tone at the top. It’s clear Bob & Corrine established the tone, and that Dan, Nicole and many others at Roosters live it every day.

If you know of excellent leaders and inspiring stories in the restaurant industry in Ohio, email me at jbarker@ohiorestaurant.org.