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The new and expanded SSDC Cleaning Program offers high quality products, programs and services designed with Qdoba Mexican Eats® in mind to help tackle every cleaning task in your restaurant. This reputation for excellence has made SSDC a trusted partner for specialty restaurant customers and franchisees all over the world. Our goal is to create a custom cleaning program tailored to your unique business and take a step toward making your restaurant Cleaner. Safer. Healthier.

SSDC Delivers:

- Commercial quality & highly effective cleaners
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- Unparalleled support & service
- Incredible value





table of contents

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2 Chairman's Column by Ron Stokes, QFA chairman

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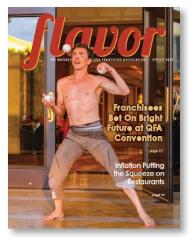
- 4 QFA Member News
- 5 Member Recognition
- 7 One Topic: 10 Facts
- 8 Look, Listen, Read
- 10 Franchisee Spotlight
- 12 QFA Franchisee Convention Recap

Directories

- 6 Associate Member Listing
- 28 Advertisers Guide and Editorial Calendar

Features

- 9 Quench Your Thirst For Knowledge: Add Flavor to Your Life With 10 Delicious Facts About Jarritos contributed by Jarritos
- 18 Inflation Putting the Squeeze on Businesses by Sean Ireland, QFA director of communications
- 21 Avanti Restaurant Solutions: Your Partner
 Through the Supply Chain Crisis
 contributed by Avanti Restaurant Solutions
- 22 Teen Workers May Be One Solution to the Great Resignation by Douglas H. Duerr, Elarbee Thompson Sapp and Wilson LLP
- 24 The Front Line Equals the Bottom Line by Dennis Snow, Snow and Associates Inc.
- 26 The Real Value of Reverence in a Relationship by Dan Coughlin, The Coughlin Co.



On the Cover

The 2022 QFA Franchisee Convention in Las Vegas brought the QDOBA franchise system together for great presentations on the business as well as provided rewarding entertainment to those who've persevered through the difficult years of the pandemic and supply chain and labor challenges. See more on page 12.

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Carry Our Convention Unity Through the Times to Come

The 2022 Qdoba Franchisee Association (QFA) Franchisee Convention is in the books, and once again, we can look back on a very successful event. It's always a positive time when we gather as franchisees with QDOBA Mexican Eats* corporate leaders and our vendor partners.

It's always a positive time when we gather as franchisees with QDOBA Mexican Eats® corporate leaders and our vendor partners.

This is when we do some of our best work – together – trading thoughts and ideas and solving the problems that affect all our businesses. Of course, there's also plenty of fun, laughter and recreation, and we had a good bit of that during our time in Las Vegas too.

Our convention was well-attended by corporate officials, QFA members and the vendor community, and everyone contributed and benefitted by providing and learning valuable information.

One of the convention's highlights

was the presentation by Don Rheem. Don leads an employee engagement tech company called E3 Solutions that takes a science-backed approach to helping organizations build engaged, high-performance cultures. His insights into the things we can do to get our teams more engaged and better positioned for success should provide short- and long-term improvements in each of our businesses.

We hope to be able to partner with Don on additional programs and training for our organizational leaders that will help them grow their skills and improve the performance of their teams. Look for more information on this to come in the months ahead.

Our next QFA convention is planned for 2024, but next year, we'll be gathering for the corporate convention.

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meantime, I urge each of you to stay connected with each other. Members of this brand have proven that we are stronger when we work together and that will be more important than ever as our restaurants face new challenges amid the economic headwinds of inflation and the increasing possibility of a recession.

The QFA is a great avenue for this cooperation. Membership in QFA allows us to lean into the support of our fellow franchisees and the resources provided by the association to overcome these types of hurdles. As we continue to feel the pressures that the labor and commodities shortages are putting on margins, you can also rely on the support of our QFA vendor partners as well. Through our alliance, we'll seek continual improvement and develop solutions for coming out on top of the profit and loss statement, even during difficult times.

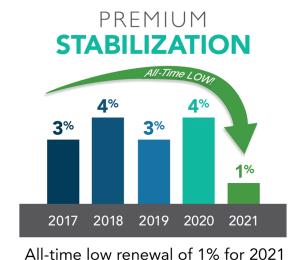
My thanks to all who attended the 2022 QFA Franchisee Convention and to those who lend your valuable time and talent to our association in its activities. You are the heart of QFA, and your efforts ensure that it will continue to beat strongly in support of our businesses, no matter what may come.

Ron Stokes
Chairman



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Franchisee Brings the Tastes of QDOBA to Canadian Food Festival

QDOBA Mexican Eats[®] franchisee, Qnorth Development Corp. (QDC), showcased the restaurant's Mexican flavors at the 2022 Kitchener Waterloo Food and Wine Festival.

Hosted in the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium in Ontario, Canada, QDOBA was one among 60-plus exhibitors to showcase its bestsellers. Held at beginning of April, the event's agenda was full of live music, chef presentations and tastings.

The entertainment was split between two stages: music and cooking. The music stage

featured performances from artists such as Colin Gray and Juneyt. The cooking stage displayed culinary expertise from seafood demonstrations to cocktail mixing.

Kitchener Locations General Manager Brooklynne Appleby gave a popular presentation on making guacamole on behalf of QDOBA.

The festival was not limited to just food and wine. Beer, spirits and coffee were also served. This gave QDC a way to serve its famous QDOBA lager alongside tortilla chips with guacamole, salsa and queso dip.

Paying to exhibit, QDC Director of Operations Dale Irwin said the event was a success. The franchise had the opportunity to serve hundreds of hungry guests and received many notes from satisfied customers.

"Many asked if they could buy our queso retail," Irwin said.



Qnorth Development Corp. set up a booth at the Kitchener Waterloo Food and Wine Festival.

QDOBA Franchisee Donates Food for EMS Week



Tim Velleca posed with the team at Central EMS after donating food for EMS Week.

n May 19, Tim Velleca, owner of Fresh Made Food, thanked a group of first responders the only way he knew how: with QDOBA Mexican Eats*.

Velleca donated a grand spread to the team at Central EMS. Central EMS provides emergent and nonemergent transport across the state of Georgia. Feeding about 150 people, the donation was made in response to EMS Week, a time dedicated to giving gratitude to all who work in emergency medical services.

The food served was a full hot bar, including white rice, black beans, chicken, steak, queso dip, pico de gallo, salsa verde, salsa roja, corn salsa, sour cream, guacamole, cheese, lettuce and homemade lime-flavored chips.

Central EMS was extremely grateful for Velleca's generosity. Stephanie Shurett, an administrative assistant at Central EMS, offered to put Velleca in the company's monthly newsletter.

"You are so gracious, and I cannot begin to express my gratitude for what you are doing for my guys," Shurett said. "From the bottom of my heart and on behalf of Central EMS, I sincerely thank you for your kindness and generosity."

QDOBA Franchisee Caters former Atlanta Falcon's Family Event

any franchisees develop relationships with customers throughout the years. Tim Velleca, owner of Fresh Made Foods, grew a bond with a former Atlanta Falcons player and Qdoba Mexican Eats® regular, Roman Fortin.

Earlier this year, Velleca donated a 60-person catering for Fortin's grandchild's first birthday celebration. Velleca wanted to show appreciation not only for Fortin's business but also for his friendship.

Velleca and Fortin did not become friends overnight. Fortin became a regular at one of Velleca's QDOBA restaurants 20 years ago. Fortin would eat at QDOBA multiple times a week, bringing

his wife and children.

"At times, when his kids were working out and getting ready for football, they would eat a burrito at 10:30 a.m.," Velleca said, "Workout. Then come back at 1 p.m. for another burrito."

The relationship between Fortin and Velleca soars beyond frequent business. Velleca has watched his family grow, with Fortin's kids having children of their own.

"Roman is a really big man with the biggest smile in the room," Velleca said. "He is over-the-top nice and enthusiastic about everything we discuss. I appreciate him in so many ways."

QDOBA Mexican Eats Franchisee Celebrates 9th Anniversary

"Dound the pavement," Dale Irwin, director of operations of Qnorth Development Group (QDG), said.

This phrase, among others, is what he claims to be the foundation of his franchise's success.

After nine years of operating a franchise with five restaurants, Irwin reflected fondly on his memories through the years and the roots of QDG's accomplishments.



Qnorth Development Group often participates in festivals and events as part of its growth strategy.



Dale Irwin, center, with members of his staff and National Hockey League player Nazem Kadri, second from right.

QDG was created through President Leo Stathakis' love for QDOBA Mexican Eats® food. Stathakis often crossed the U.S.-Canadian border into Michigan to get his fill of QDOBA. Loving the brand that much, Stathakis partnered with Irwin and other colleagues. With that, the franchise was born.

Opening his first location in Ontario, Canada, in March 2013, Irwin said that introducing QDOBA to Canada took time and effort. With the company's restaurant being one of the first in Canada, raising brand awareness was his main goal. He implemented tactics such as going door-to-door, spreading the word on the street, and setting up booths at local festivals to gain traction.

"You've got to keep your finger on the pulse of the store."

- Dale Irwin

"Word of mouth and great operations sell on their own," Irwin said.

These tactics proved fruitful as QDC opened its second location within eight months of the first.

Irwin believes strongly in employee retention. Seeking exemplary personnel and providing them with a healthy work environment is what he believes to be fundamental to a franchisee's success. Irwin's years of service to the company are filled with joyous memories working his staff – catering events and working festivals.

"You've got to keep your finger on the pulse of the store," he said.

The future of the QDG seems prosperous. Irwin hopes to expand into the greater Toronto area, which is booming with people and business. Upon this anniversary, Irwin remains confident about QDOBA's food and the company's direction.

recognitions

Congratulations to the following Dakota Kid LLC employees:

Brandon Yates, district manager, is celebrating his 10-year anniversary with Dakota Kid LLC this year.

ReNee Hauck is a general manager and celebrates her seventh anniversary with the company this year.

Okot Echum is a general manager and has been with QDOBA for seven years.



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flavor SPRING 2022

One topic: 10 facts



EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS:

Keeping Teams Happy During the Great Resignation

What is the Great Resignation?

- The number of American workers resigning hit record highs in November 2021, with **4.5 million** employees quitting their jobs, creating what has been nicknamed the Great Resignation.
- Not all job sectors are being affected equally. **About 6.9**% of those working in the accommodation and food-services sectors quit in November, while **only 1.7**% of those working in finance left their positions.
- These **920,000** workers who quit their jobs at restaurants, bars and hotels left openings of **8.4%** of jobs in those industries in November.

So, why are employees leaving? What are they expecting from their employers to keep them happy? One study shows that **fairness** in the workplace is a make-or-break factor for employees.

• According to a Gartner Inc. survey of 3,500 employees, only **18**% feel that they work in a high fairness environment and have an employee experience that is characterized as fair.

- The survey found that employees who work in a high-fairness environment have a **26**% higher performance level than those who don't ...
 - \bullet ... and are 27% less likely to quit their jobs.

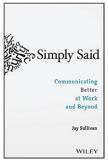
What are companies doing to retain their employees and hire new ones?

- Increasing wages: Wage rates in 2021 increased about **10%** for restaurants.
- Investing in employee health: In 2020, **94**% of companies made significant investments in their physical, mental and financial well-being programs. This trend continued into 2021 and is expected to grow further in 2022.
- Utilizing technology for good: Adobe's 2021 State of Work Survey found that before COVID-19, **about 22%** of workers claimed they had quit their jobs because workplace technology made their jobs challenging.
- Today, **over** 32% of workers claim they will quit if technology at work becomes a bottleneck to performing their job.

Sources: National Bureau of Labor Statistics, Gartner Inc., Restaurant Business Online, Adobe



ook, Listen, Read is a quarterly compilation of some of the most highly rated and reviewed apps, podcasts, books, websites and other resources. QFA does not support or endorse the use of these tools, which merely serve as a guide to exploring a new level of knowledge and productivity for your business.



"Simply Said" is the essential handbook for business communication.

Do you ever feel as though your message hasn't gotten across? Do details get lost along the way? Have tense situations ever escalated unnecessarily? We all communicate, but few of us do it well. From tough presentations to everyday transactions, there is no scenario that cannot be

improved with better communication skills.



In "WorkLife with Adam Grant," organizational psychologist Adam Grant takes you inside the minds of some of the world's most unusual professionals to explore the science of making work not suck. From learning how to love criticism to

harnessing the power of frustration, one thing's for sure: You'll never see your job the same way again.

In "The Culture Factor" podcast, you'll hear conversations with founders and influential leaders about company culture. Hosts share stories from the C-suite that help executives engage their business from the inside and create a map to transform their culture. Because the truth is: culture eats strategy for breakfast.



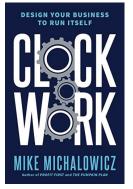
Well-being is the most misunderstood, misaligned and undervalued asset in business today. This needs to change. To address this, Daryl Brown and Lina Mbirkou are igniting conversations around measurable and accountable methods and processes for

developing a thriving, generative conscious workplace culture in the **"Beyond Wellbeing"** podcast.

SOS Inventory is designed to make inventory tracking, order management and manufacturing easier. SOS Inventory integrates with both QuickBooks and Shopify and can be used on desktop, tablet or mobile. With this app, you can manage inventory in more than one business location, track your items according to several different attributes (like serial number and cost history) and create tickets and packing slips, among other features.

If you're managing more than a few employees and need to implement larger, more complicated processes, **Trello** is a good option. This card-based system lets you easily create, assign, monitor, update and complete different tasks – it's a great way to make sure everyone is as productive and efficient as possible.

This resource management software allows you to check team availability, schedule resources and track working time and days off within one application. Customizable reports can also be generated within **Teamdeck** to help you oversee your team's performance and track the KPIs of your choosing with online software and a corresponding mobile app.



If you're like most entrepreneurs, you started your business so you could be your own boss, make the money you deserve and live life on your own terms. But you're bogged down in the daily grind, constantly putting out fires, answering an endless stream of questions and continually hunting for cash. Author Mike Michalowicz offers a straightforward step-by-step path out of this dilemma.

In "Clockwork," he draws on more than six years of research and real-life examples to explain his simple approach to making your business ultra-efficient.





Quench Your Thirst For Knowledge:

Add *flavor* to your life with 10 delicious facts about Jarritos

Jarritos is an iconic Mexican brand of great-tasting, fruit-flavored soft drinks made with natural flavors. The brand has been celebrating differences and authenticity since 1950. Jarritos comes from the vibrant streets of Mexico, where optimism and hope overrule adversity, and where bright colors and bold flavors are the norm and not the exception. Here are 10 facts about this "Super Good" soda brand:

1. Jarritos has 13 Super Good flavors.

There is a flavor for everyone: pineapple, guava, mango, watermelon, strawberry, fruit punch, passionfruit, tamarind, mandarin, hibiscus, grapefruit, lime and cola.

2. Jarritos very first flavor was coffee.

Don Francisco "El Güero" Hill was a visionary and created a coffee-flavored soda before switching his interest to fruit-flavored sodas. The first one was mandarin, soon followed by lime, tamarind and fruit punch.

3. The Jarritos logo shares its colors with two popular flavors.

Coincidence? Maybe so. In English, "Jarritos" translates into "little jugs," the same kind of clay jugs on the Jarritos logo that kept fruit-flavored agua frescas cooler longer in the olden days. The little jugs were also naturally orange and brown on the bottom and glazed green on the top — colors that happen to correspond with two

of Jarritos' most popular flavors: mandarin and lime!

4. The original Jarritos bottles were unlabeled.

The famous Jarritos logo and its tagline "¡Que Buenos Son!" were painted on every bottle without flavor descriptions. However, early Jarritos consumers knew which flavors to pick by simply looking at their color: orange for mandarin, brown for tamarind, red for fruit punch, pink for guava and green for lime.

5. August 29 is the Official Anniversary of Jarritos.

On this historic day, the brand encourages its customers to celebrate their favorite flavor by raising the iconic glass bottle in honor of Jarritos' founder, Don Francisco "El Güero" Hill. Salud!

6. Jarritos is a Mexican bestseller.

Jarritos was born in 1950. By 1960, it was bottled and sold in 80% of the 32 Mexican states, making Jarritos the No. 1 bestselling Mexican soft drink brand in the country.

7. Jarritos has been in the U.S. for over three decades.

In 1988, Jarritos began exporting its products to the U.S., where the brand quickly positioned itself as the top-selling Mexican product in the Hispanic market. The brand quickly gained appeal with

non-Hispanic consumers that now represent most of its consumers.

8. Jarritos is the "Official Drink of Tacos."

For the last 72 years, our fans have made it perfectly clear, when it comes to tacos, there is no better pairing than Jarritos.

9. Jarritos adds flavor to a variety of recipes.

By having so many different flavors to choose from, Jarritos is a great complement to your favorite fare, including dessert and cocktails! Fans can find a variety of recipes for barbacoa tacos, paletas, floats and more on the Jarritos website.

10. Jarritos is sold all over the world.

Following the success of the brand in Mexico and in the U.S., Jarritos is currently sold in over 40 countries, including Germany, Korea, Canada and New Zealand.

To learn more about what makes these Mexican sodas so deliciously delightful and to access their store locator to learn where you can find their products, visit www.jarritos.com.

Jarritos is an Emerald partner member of the Qdoba Franchisee Association. The company may be reached at 915-309-8771 or www.jarritos.com

flavor SPRING 2022

Matt Herridge

Member, QFA Board of Directors

Company name: Charton Management

Number of restaurants: Three

States your restaurants operate in: Ohio West Virginia

How did you become a QDOBA Mexican Eats® franchisee?

My business partner, Grant Wharton, and I had been looking at a companion brand to the BURGER KING® restaurants we operate, and we were targeting the fast-casual sector. We looked at several fast-casual opportunities and others including a coffee brand, a fitness center brand, a couple of burrito brands and even a fast-fired pizza brand. We decided QDOBA Mexican Eats was the best opportunity for us, and we felt that it was missing in our region. We did not have a Chipotle restaurant immediately in our region, and we believe it's important to be the first in the market and saw an opportunity there.

How did you meet your business partners?

My business partner is my brother-in-law, Grant Wharton, and we've been franchisees since 2005 with BURGER KING. This was an evolution of that partnership into this companion fast-casual direction.

In your opinion, what stands out about the QDOBA brand?

One of the things is that it had a lot of upside potential in terms of sales volume. We were aware of the competing brand, which has \$2 million-plus average unit volumes (AUVs). QDOBA was close to BURGER KING in terms of average unit volumes. We thought if it can be done with another similar brand, why can't we hit those volumes as well? Our BURGER KINGs usually have higher AUVs than most others. Since we have always been



significantly above that level, we could do it with another brand that is a direct competitor with a sector leader.

What is the best piece of business advice you have ever received?

A restaurant franchisee once told me this: I'd much rather own 25 restaurants that are high-volume, well-run restaurants than 100 middling restaurants. His point was that for most of us, a small percentage of our restaurants take most our time. It's better to have less on your plate with higher volumes than more on your plate with lower volumes. We want to make each of our restaurants the best they can be and help them reach their full potential.

Looking ahead, what are your top three business goals for your company?

No. 1 is to increase traffic. We also want to continue to increase the number of QDOBA fans. We find that we are still relatively unknown. We want to increase awareness, and by that, increase traffic. We'd like to become, from a digital perspective, the go-to online and delivery option for people so they know they can order ahead, come in and walk out with their food efficiently. Finally, we want to become the go-to, first-thought catering solution for our community.

flavor SPRING **2022**

franchisee spotlight

What do you feel is the biggest challenge currently facing franchisees?

Labor costs and the labor shortage. We spend more money for a smaller number of employees that are not necessarily as productive as those we've had in the past. It's the biggest challenge across all our brands, and it requires that we be the employer of choice and offer a better work experience than anyone else around.

We've gone from simply catering and inside dining to a multiplicity of solutions by which people can order and get their food.

What is the biggest industry change that you have seen since you started?

It's the explosion of mechanisms by which people can now get their food. I sat in our new Vienna, West Virginia, restaurant when it opened last year and realized we had six different ways people could order QDOBA. They could come in the restaurant and order, order online and pick it up, order online and have it

delivered, or order online and pick it up with curbside delivery. Our new restaurant is one of the first QDOBAs to have a drivethru, and we also have catering. We've gone from simply catering and inside dining to a multiplicity of solutions by which people can order and get their food. It can be overwhelming for our teams, but we must be able to compete in that environment.

What will be your focus as a member of the QFA Board of Directors?

I think one of our company's strengths is being on the cutting edge of IT solutions. I hope to bring a voice to the IT opportunities we have with the brand. Given that I have experience with another brand, I would like us to continue to focus on becoming more effective from a supply chain and food-sourcing direction. Also, I hope that as a member of the brand advisory council, I can help maintain the positive working relations that the rest of the QFA members have created to date with corporate leadership.

Tell us a little bit about your family.

I have three adult children and four grandchildren with the two newest being twin boys born on St. Patrick's Day. One funny thing is the name my grandchildren have chosen for me. I'm not Grandpa, Granddad or Papaw. The name I've been given is simply Matt.

If I weren't a franchisee, I would be ...

Probably running for public office or more involved in the political arena.







n April 19-23, the Qdoba Franchisee Association (QFA) held its QFA Franchisee Convention in Las Vegas. QDOBA Mexican Eats® franchisees, managers and system suppliers, as well as representatives from QDOBA corporate, met at the Wynn Las Vegas for several days of education and networking.

The agenda presented attendees with opportunities to hear brand updates, association updates and an insightful keynote address on hiring and retention from Don Rheem, CEO of E3 Solutions. Franchisees also had time to network with vendors in the exhibit hall and during the Moroccan-themed closing party!

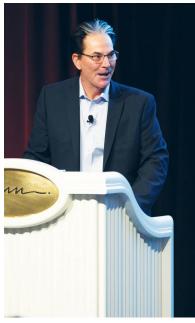
QFA is looking forward to its next convention, which will be in 2024.



An attendee picks up his badge and materials from the registration desk.



Franchisee Stew Melhaff converses with a QDOBA Corp. team member.



QFA Chairman Ron Stokes welcomes attendees to Las Vegas.



Brent Daniels, Jamal Farha and Jim Anderson smile for a photo before general session begins.



Attendees listen as Ron Stokes delivers his welcome remarks.

DAY 1 GENERAL SESSION AND AWARDS LUNCHEON



QDOBA CEO Keith Guilbault provides a brand update to attendees.



Attendees enjoy a lunch buffet before the awards presentation.



Franchisee and QFA board member Leo Stathakis accepts his award for Innovator of the Year.



QDOBA Corp. presented franchisees with awards in many different categories during the Awards Luncheon.



Paul Sinowitz shares information about supply chain with attendees.



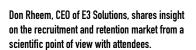
QDOBA Director of Food Safety & Technical Services Michael Moomjian gives updates on products to franchisees.



Eric Rosenzweig, QDOBA vice president of information technology, discusses IT updates with attendees.



Wade Gosnell, Keith Johnson, Bill Nelsen and Paul Wisnoski conduct the Operational Excellence panel.



DAY 1 OPENING RECEPTION AND EXHIBIT HALL



Attendees visit SSDC's booth in the trade show.



From left, Alex Courtney, Jen Kim, Josh Reichardt and Amanda Allbee from Grubhub smile behind their booth.



Amber and Chris Christianson from TJH Holdings enjoy a drink during the opening reception.



Jose Hernandez from Novamex shows off his company's products in his booth.



Brian Grant and Jules Nacario from AmerCareRoyal share their products with a franchisee.



Attendees learn more about SKECHERS products at the company's booth.



Brian Morton from Silk Screen Shirts Inc. smiles as he networks with an attendee.



Franchisees from TIG Queso indulge in drinks together during the opening reception.

DAY 2 BREAKFAST, GENERAL SESSION AND LUNCH/TRADE SHOW



A breakfast buffet kicks off the second day of the convention.





QDOBA Vice President of Marketing Karin Silk gives a marketing update to attendees.

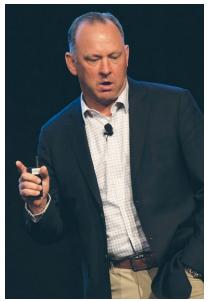


Tom Lewison, Randy Beaver, Steve Honner and Jamal Farha share information about profit and loss statements during the Propelling Your Profits Panel.



QDOBA Vice President of Operations Eric Williams begins the general session with operations updates.





QDOBA Vice President of Supply Chain Jim Sullivan updates franchisees on the supply chain.

Randy Key, Ross Telerman, Brent Daniels and Brent Bernard listen to an audience member's question during the Staffing and Retention Panel.



Katy Velasquez, head chef at QDOBA Corp., provides some insight about future menu items at QDOBA.

CLOSING EVENT



Cigar rollers rolled custom cigars for closing event attendees.





Franchisees Julie and Randall Gast enjoy hors d'oeuvres during the closing party.



Attendees enjoy a Moroccan-themed dinner buffet.

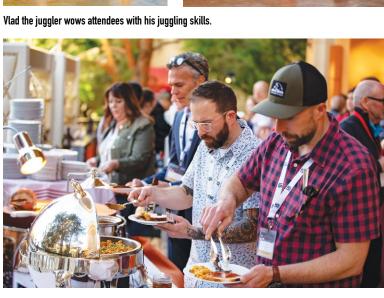


A belly dancer shows off her skills at the closing event.











Father-daughter franchisee duo Bassam and Ashley Odeh smile for the camera at the closing party.



Ashley Roig, Nadya Shihadeh and Yve Morris pose for a photo.



Franchisees, managers and vendors mix and mingle.



Ron and Denise Stokes show off their Henna tattoos.



Franchisees Tim Velleca and Wade Gosnell enjoy a cigar.



Sweet treats were also a part of the menu at the closing party.

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Inflation Putting the

SQUELZE on Businesses



hile the news that menu price inflation hit a 40-year high in March made headlines across the restaurant industry, the reality is that restaurant owners and franchisees have long been aware of the pressures that higher labor costs and supply chain snarls have been placing on their businesses. March's increase in menu pricing may have been the biggest indicator yet of the inflation affecting restaurants and the overall economy, but business owners in the industry have seen the signs for months. That they are boosting their own prices after feeling the pinch is no surprise.

"With the initial recession starting in February 2020, we didn't notice pricing issues right away, but more 10-12 months

"Our restaurants have tried to trend being one of the highest-paying restaurants in the city. By adding tips to the mix, our employees average an additional \$2 per hour each."

> Stew Mehlhaff, operating partner for TJH Holdings LLC

later, in January-February 2021," said Stew Mehlhaff, operating partner for TJH Holdings LLC, which has two QDOBA Mexican Eats® restaurants in South Dakota. The ongoing labor difficulties faced by the hospitality industry, combined with supply chain disruptions, hit restaurants with a one-two punch in 2021 that



ignited inflation to levels not seen since the early 1980s. According to federal data cited in Restaurant Business Online, industry wages are up more than 11% year-over-year and food costs are up 13%.

Any hopes that the pressure would ease ended with Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, which sent fuel and energy prices higher and could disrupt the food supply chain even further. For now, there's no end in sight.

Wages and salaries overall for private industry workers increased 5% in 2021, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the cost of benefits increased 2.9% for the year. Mehlhaff's restaurants are seeing it up close, especially as they strive to attract and retain employees. "Labor costs have continued to rise and have added 3% to 4% to our labor cost percentage," he said. "Our restaurants have tried to trend being one of the highest-paying restaurants in the city. By adding tips to the mix, our employees average an additional \$2 per hour each. The tip option at the POS has become very important to our hourly employees and is a key employee attraction point.

"As far as labor costs, we have had more 32-plus hour employees sign up for the health, eye and dental plans that we Continued on page 20





Inflation

Continued from page 19

offer," he added. "In addition, we recently added a \$25,000 life insurance policy for these employees, and the cost to do this is very reasonable, \$68 per month for our two restaurants. We recently changed to allowing our team members to eat for free while they are on the job."

Boosting benefits and being creative to incentivize employees to stay is almost a necessity in an economy where unemployment numbers were at 3.6% in March and the labor pool is shrinking. For TJH Holdings, it seems to be working. "When it comes to retaining employees during these inflationary times, our core crew of 14-16 team members at each store are more dedicated than they've ever been because they find it hard to find comparable wages to match what they were making," Mehlhaff said. "We've tried to be more flexible with schedules, to the point that we have three to four employees who work only one or two shifts a week, with us accommodating their requests. We've noticed too that if the employee needs time off that they know exactly how many hours of PTO they have and take advantage of those paid hours."

"The most pronounced issue has been the inadvertent hit-and-miss order fulfillment by the distribution center, ranging from produce supply and quality issues to paper supplies, queso, proteins and the long-lasting shortage of catering supplies."

> Stew Mehlhaff, operating partner for TIH Holdings LLC

The additional costs of wages and benefits are one side of the inflation crunch. The other comes from increasing expenses for food and materials caused by shortages and increased shipping costs. The National Restaurant Association (NRA) noted in September that wholesale food prices had posted the highest 12-month increase since 1980. Among restaurant commodity prices, beef was up 60%, fats and oils up 50% and eggs up nearly 40%. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Consumer Price Index for Food indicated that all food prices were 6.3% higher at the end of the 2021 than they were in December 2020.

For TJH Holdings, "the most pronounced issue has been the inadvertent hit-and-miss order fulfillment by the distribution center, ranging from produce supply and quality issues to paper supplies, queso, proteins and the long-lasting shortage of catering supplies," Mehlhaff said. "I typically go to our local Sam's Club three to four days per week to acquire catering supplies, sometimes

avocados, tomatoes, green leaf lettuce and other products."

Operators have had little choice but to pass on increases to consumers. The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that restaurant menu price inflation hit a 40-year high in March. Food-away-from-home inflation rose 6.9% from March 2021 to March 2022, the largest increase since December 1981. Prices at full-service restaurants were up 8% in March 2022 over March 2021. Price increases are one of the few ways franchisees can try to keep up and maintain profitability.

"As far as food costs, our group has raised consumer prices three times in the past 18 months to combat the rising food costs," Mehlhaff said. "We've raised prices 4%-6% depending on the entrée. In my years with QDOBA I never thought I'd ever see a \$10 burrito, but I believe we'll see entrees up into the \$12-\$13 range for products such as Impossible meat and brisket if the recession continues."

For now, he said consumers haven't let higher prices affect their spending habits, at least in the company's two QDOBA locations. "We are showing nice growth in our stores with a big impact in our 2021 year-end sales," Mehlhaff said. "Our stores have had very little pushback from customers as far as entrée pricing, but we've had some pushback from third-party guests who aren't happy with the delivery of cold food, missed items or poor delivery service. We mitigate complaints by contacting the guest and trying to resolve any issue not caused by the service. We continually get great positive feedback about our team's friendliness, speed of service and longevity of our team members.

TJH Holdings saw a 24.14% increase in sales from Jan. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2021, over the same period in 2020, which Mehlhaff credits in part to its store locations in an area with high tourist traffic. From Oct. 1, 2021, to April 1, 2022, sales increased 13.98% over the same period the previous year. "Inflation of fuel prices and partially higher menu prices throughout the industry are, I believe, the primary reasons for a slower increase in sales," he said. "The 2022 tourist traffic is forecast to be larger than 2021, but with fuel prices, this remains to be seen."

While labor and supply chain troubles were the biggest contributors to inflation in 2021, rising fuel prices spurred by world reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been the biggest driver in 2022. Volatile energy prices could be the tipping point that pushes consumers to begin drawing back on spending, and one of the first places for cutbacks is usually on away-from-home dining. A survey by financial services firm Primerica cited by Restaurant Business seems to indicate that while inflation didn't affect spending habits before, higher gas prices may finally be slowing them down. Nearly 80% of middle-income consumers now say they've noted the increase in menu prices, and almost 60% said they anticipate cutting back on restaurant meals.

According to the NRA's State of the Restaurant Industry Report published earlier this year, restaurant owners are bracing for inflation challenges for months to come. "2022 for the restaurant industry will remain another year of transition, and the year is off to a pretty sober start," said Hudson Riehle, senior vice president of the NRA's research and knowledge group in a story for CNBC. "When you survey restaurant operators, 76% across the country now say that business currently is worse than it was three months ago. It remains a fairly volatile and uncertain environment."

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: Your Partner AVANTI Through the Supply Chain Crisis

early a year after most of the U.S. resumed business, shutdowns abroad are still causing massive supply chain challenges. Equipment has become almost impossible to come by, with lead times as long as six months.

According to a recent National Restaurant Association survey, 95% of restaurants have experienced significant supply delays or shortages in recent months.

"Your question isn't 'What's the cost?' It's 'When can I get it?" said Avanti CEO Mark Rossi.

This shortage is causing delays across the country, holding up new construction, bringing kitchen remodels to a halt and delaying new restaurant openings significantly.

QDOBA Mexican Eats® Restaurants Aren't Exempt

Supply chain issues have significantly impacted all restaurants, QDOBAs included.

- Cost increases: Supply shortages are causing prices to soar, along with the cost of materials, gas prices and supply shortages.
- Opening delays: With some equipment taking months to arrive, delays are inevitable. Construction stops when equipment isn't ready for installation.
- Slower throughput: Some food-service operators are attempting to make do with the equipment they have, delaying remodels and appliance upgrades.
- A decline in quality: Unreliable appliances can cause problems with the food quality and can cause long-lasting damage to your restaurant's reputation if you're not careful.

When Will Supply Chain Issues Improve?

That's tough to predict. January 2023 seemed like a safe prediction back in January, but with continued lockdowns in China, it's likely to stretch even farther.

However, there are things you can do to prevent disruption to your business:

- Get in line as soon as you can. Order your equipment at least eight weeks before you think you need it, or sooner if you can swing it.
- Have a backup plan. What will you do if you can't get the exact equipment you need? Can you make do with what you have? Is there a slightly different model you can use? Know the answers to these questions before you must ask them.
- Don't worry about specifications or customizations. If you're in a pinch, find something that will work for now and upgrade in the future if you need to.
- Consider used equipment. If you can find what you need in the used market, go with that option.
- Understand the construction process. Find out when you really need the equipment for installation, not just when it would be ideal. Ask questions and see if you can work with your team for

the best possible outcome.

• Trust your vendors. If they tell you they can't get it, it's not gettable. New equipment is hard to get, and used equipment has become just as scarce. Trying to circumvent your vendors and find equipment elsewhere will just waste time and cause even more stress. Just trust that vendors are doing what they can.

Work with a Partner that Knows Your Business

Avanti Restaurant Solutions provides equipment sourcing, financing and commercial kitchen design to QDOBAs around the country. We've partnered with franchisees to help them manage their supply chain issues and other unique problems in the last few years.

We've helped our QDOBA partners combat long times by:

- · Helping franchisees plan for long lead times
- Staying in close contact with franchisees, vendors and contractors
- Working with corporate to approve new equipment alternatives

A proud QDOBA partner for over a decade, our dedicated account teams ensure you work with someone who knows QDOBA restaurants and can help you solve problems before they impact your bottom line.

What Does the Future Hold?

We know problems in the food and beverage industry extend beyond restaurant equipment and appliances, but the good news is that there is hope on the horizon. After these prolonged problems, we'll likely see some lasting improvements in the supply chain.

"[Manufacturing] is moving from just in time to just in case," said Rossi. "We're likely going to see more safety stock and backup components to prepare for future supply chain disruptions."

Work with Avanti to Help Navigate Your Supply Chain Issues

Avanti's dedicated account team and agile processes have kept QDOBA projects on track with minimal disruption during the supply chain crisis.

We don't just sell equipment. We ensure your project's success every step of the way. With over 18 years of experience, we can leverage relationships and smart workarounds to get you the equipment you need to get the job done.

To learn more about how the Avanti team is helping navigate these supply chain challenges, reach out to Director of Chain Accounts Shawna Snyder at 916-693-3047 or email ssnyder@avanticorporate.com.

Avanti Restaurant Supply is a Sapphire partner member of the Qdoba Franchisee Association. The company may be reached at 916-693-3047 or www.avanticorporate.com.

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Teen Workers May Be One Solution to the Great Resignation



here are the workers? I wish I knew. There are many theories, but none of them are completely satisfactory. While it might be intellectually interesting to know the "why" if you have the luxury of free time, the fact is that the Great Resignation has taken almost every employer by surprise; the hit on productivity and customer service is hard to bear.

With the continuing difficulty (inability?) of filling job vacancies, many employers have resorted to costly tactics, such as referral and sign-on bonuses, increased pay, enhanced benefits and foosball tables in the breakroom (well, OK, maybe not that, but more and better snacks and drinks are now common). Despite these efforts, finding, hiring and then retaining employees is harder than ever. This reality is confounding because the so-called labor participation rate (the percentage of individuals of working age who are working or actively

looking for work) is still below pre-pandemic rates as of January and well below the average since 2000.

While the "why" behind the shortage of workers may be unclear, the impact is unavoidable. So what to do when individuals are not looking to work even when offered good pay and benefits? One response is to take a second look at hiring teens under 18 years old. In fact, according to a report

by Doug Duerr

from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) last fall, the labor participation rate for workers 16-19 is only slightly more than half the overall rate and still much lower than the rates preceding the 2008 economic downturn. That is, there is an even larger pool of

flavor SPRING 2022

untapped labor that employers (particularly readers of this magazine) could target for recruitment to fill job vacancies.

At this point, you might be thinking to yourself something like, "Aren't there reasons why I decided some time ago not to hire younger workers?" All sorts of rules come with teens depending upon their age. That's why you may have decided "no one under 18."

Yes, there are some rules that come with workers under 18, but it may now be time to take a new look at those burdens and the costs associated with the positions you cannot fill. There is an untapped pool of workers who could help fill some of the gaps driving those signs that offer some variation of: "We are not fully staffed, so sorry for the poor customer service. Please do not get angry."

What are the rules and burdens? Both state and federal laws govern the hours or work and occupations (i.e., tasks) for employees under 18. Generally, limitations on the hours of work only apply to those 15 (as well as significant limitations on tasks) and younger and fall away once a teen reaches 16 years of age. Once a teen reaches 16, the only limitations that typically apply relate to safety (e.g., no driving, no use of power-driven bakery machines, compactors, balers, etc.). It is typically not practicable to hire anyone younger than 14. For a general overview of the federal requirements, this link directs you to helpful information: www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/youthrules/employers.

While the rules and burdens of hiring a teen are generally lower once the teen turns 16, for those reading this magazine, it is important that you follow the rules for obtaining certification of the teen's age as prescribed by state law. As with many laws governing interactions with those under 18, a good-faith belief that the teen is 14 or 16 is not enough. While in most instances, the burden for obtaining a work permit can be largely borne by the

worker with little input from the employer, it is critical that a work permit (or certificate) is obtained when employing anyone under 18. That burden, however, particularly if hiring a teen at least 16 years old, should be more than offset by the benefit of filling the vacant position.

While for most readers of this magazine, hiring a worker 16 or older could be very beneficial, one thing to keep in mind is the issue of harassment, particularly sexual harassment. Significantly, the concerns here are the same for workers who are 18, 19, 20, etc. Many young workers, not just teen workers, (including their young supervisors and managers) do not have even a basic understanding of the rules and boundaries governing conduct in the workplace. It is imperative that all young employees, particularly supervisors and managers, be well educated on issues of harassment, including examples of what conduct (particularly sexual jokes, requests for dates and touching) is not permitted. They also need to understand, which is sometimes particularly difficult for supervisors to grasp, that the limitations apply outside of work when interacting with co-workers and subordinates.

Teen workers represent a large pool of potential workers to fill those vacancies that are hard (or impossible) to fill with those who are at least 18. While there are some additional burdens that come with hiring workers younger than 18, those burdens are greatly lessened for those workers who are 16-17 years old. Thus, the time may be right to re-examine your recruitment program.

DOUGLAS H. DUERR is a partner at Elarbee Thompson, a national labor and employment law firm with an industry practice area focused on franchisees. Learn more at www.elarbeethompson.com.





The Front Line EQUALS the Bottom Line

by Dennis Snow

ost of us have heard the expression, "The front line is the bottom line," as it pertains to a company's employees. It means that as far as the customer is concerned, a company's front-line employees are the company. After all, rarely do customers have contact with an organization's executives.

Those front-line employees are truly the face of the organization. But as leaders, do we perform in a way that is consistent with the front line equals bottom line philosophy? In many cases, I think the answer is no.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

It's hard for me to think of a better example of the front line equals the bottom line philosophy than what we are all experiencing right now. Businesses of all kinds find themselves struggling to find front-line workers. Just over the past few months, I've lost count of how many times I've pulled up to a drive-thru restaurant only to find it closed or the employees completely overwhelmed because they don't have enough staff to manage their customers.

Business owners that I talk with are now having to get behind the counter to serve customers themselves because one of their remaining employees called in sick, and there is no one else to fill in for them.

Front-line staff in hotels are being asked to pick up the slack after several of their co-workers were furloughed and not brought back because management felt they could do without them and meet their guests' minimum needs. This has placed an enormous strain on staff members and employee burnout is becoming a significant problem.

It's not hard to see how truly important the front-line staff is for any business.

WHY FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES ARE CRITICAL FOR BUSINESS

I was pondering this issue a while back while I sat eating in a TGI Fridays restaurant. As I was observing the employees, the

reality of the situation hit me. These servers, bus boys, etc., are the most important people in the company. I knew this intellectually (I've talked about it for years), but the **truth** of it hit me at that moment.

These employees are typically the lowest paid in the organization, treated as expendable, often treated in a condescending manner, and yet they are the most important people in the company. If these employees



fail in their duties, it makes no difference how smart the senior vice president of marketing is. The transaction between the customer and the company (the front-line employee) can so easily crash and burn.

This is true in restaurants, hospitals, banks, grocery stores or any other industry/organization. Executives can call in sick, but if the truck drivers for a distribution center don't show up one day, now there is a situation. When they do their jobs with pride and enthusiasm, the likelihood of company success is exponentially increased. When they do their jobs with boredom and skepticism, the greatest technology systems in the world won't help.

HOW TO TREAT YOUR FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

We should treat our front-line employees like the stars they are. We should honor them for the work they do because they are the ones that make the world turn. All our strategies, visions and corporate goals are only as good as the execution of those plans, and execution ultimately comes down to front-line people doing things. Theirs is the most honest work of all.

The customer was either happy, or she wasn't. The delivery either happened on time, or it did not. The cooler was either stocked or not. The food was either hot, or it was not. The front line doesn't need a report in a binder to know how things are going. The score is real time for them.







THE FRONT LINE IS THE BOTTOM LINE LESSONS

I think what is missing in business today is knowing the importance of the front line at a **gut level**. Most of us know that we should say the front line is the bottom line, but I don't think it often shines through in our actions. If it did, we would be having pizza parties regularly, pitching in to help when things are busy and taking employees to lunch regularly to ask what can be improved. We would hold celebrations all the time. We would say thank you at every opportunity.

Think about those times in your personal life when you were grateful for something that someone did. I mean truly grateful. Remember how sincere and heartfelt your appreciation was toward that person? Can you remember the last time you showed that level of appreciation to an employee or group of employees in your organization?

The need to be appreciated is one of the strongest needs of all. When employees work hard all day, doing the real work of the company, being treated with honor isn't too much to ask.

Having a lavish holiday party for the executive team while giving me a \$2 tree ornament says something about how you feel about my contributions. Walking by the reception desk, the loading dock or the stockroom without acknowledging employees, taking a moment to see how things are going or just saying thanks are all behaviors that tell employees what management really thinks. Is it any wonder that turnover in front-line positions is so ridiculously high?

RECOGNITION: THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING 'THANK YOU'

When my wife and I were both working, we had a house-keeper, Val, who cleaned our house once a week. She was truly an

excellent housekeeper and would clean even the hardest-to-reach areas. Debbie, my wife, sincerely appreciated the extra effort and would always show her appreciation. My wife and Val became good friends. One time Val mentioned that although she cleaned a lot of houses, Debbie was the only one who appreciated those extra touches and actually **showed** appreciation.

What is important to note is that Debbie didn't say thank you to get Val to do the extras. Debbie thanked Val because she did the extras. Val, however, said that she wanted to do more because of the appreciation. It was simply a sincere cycle of performance and appreciation. Saying thank you and recognizing the people who work hard is simply the right thing to do. And usually when we do the right thing, we get the right thing in return. Not always, but usually.

You know who the front-line employees are in your own organization. I challenge you to take a hard look at the level of appreciation that you show to those front-line employees. Do they know that you appreciate them? How do they know that you appreciate them?

DENNIS SNOW is the president of Snow & Associates Inc. Dennis worked with The Walt Disney Co. for 20 years and now consults with organizations around the world, helping them achieve their customer service goals. He is the author of "Unleashing Excellence: The Complete Guide to Ultimate Customer Service" and "Lessons From the Mouse: A Guide for Applying Disney World's Secrets of Success to Your Organization, Your Career, and Your Life." You can reach Snow at 407-294-1855 or visit his website at www.snowassociates.com.





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The Real Value of Reverence in Relationship

by Dan Coughlin

everence is a dignified word.

Since I'm a self-professed non-fancy word kind of guy,
I had to look it up. It sounded so, well, fancy to me. This
time I like the Merriam-Webster definition better than anything I
could have come up with. The definition of reverence is "respect
felt or shown."

I love that. It's so simple. Success in relationships comes down to respect that goes both ways. Respect that you feel coming from the other person, and respect you show to the other person. The enormous value of reverence is true in marriages, friendships, families, communities and work relationships. Rather than trying to break respect down into seven easy-to-remember steps, I'm just going to share with you one remarkable example of reverence in my life.

Jeff Hutchison (Hutch)

I met Hutch in 1978 when we were 15-year-old sophomores in Mr. Calacci's World Cultures class. We sat right next to each other. Hit it off from day one. He's been my best buddy for 43 years.

In high school Hutch was already a salesman extraordinaire. He went on to have a fabulous career in sales as a salesperson and mainly as a sales executive. He's worked for Proctor & Gamble, Brach's Candy, Boston Scientific, Medtronic, Motus GI and a few other great companies. He's lived in Texas, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Nashville.

I was an aspiring teacher when we met. In the summers I worked at camps for grade school kids, and then went on to be a high school math teacher, soccer coach, and then an executive coach and seminar leader. I lived in Indiana, Chicago and St. Louis.

Since 1981 we went to different colleges, lived in different cities and worked in different industries. Hutch has three children and I have two children, and they are all in their 20s. Our personal and professional lives never overlapped, except for three magical weeks in 1989 when we lived together in Chicago as he was moving to Chicago, and I was moving out.

And yet somehow we have managed to talk at least once every other week for 43 years.

Hutch has been married to Jean for 32 years, and I've been married to Barb for 25 years.

Last weekend for the first time ever, the four of us spent a weekend together in Nashville without anyone else. And we had a blast for three days. It was as if we were together all the time.

What's the Secret?

How in the world have Hutch and I been able to maintain such a high-quality friendship over the past five decades?

It all comes down to that fancy word: reverence.

- We consistently have shown respect to each other and felt respect from each other.
- We know every dream the other person has aspired after, and we've respectfully cheered each other on.
- We know each other's successes and failures.
- We have respectfully given each other mountains of advice, and we have each received the advice in a respectful way.
- We have respectfully been supportive of the other person's children and their efforts.
- We listen respectfully to each other and apologize when we make a mistake.
- We still occasionally hand write respectful letters of encouragement to each other.
- We look forward to our next respectful conversation.
 Imagine if every relationship in our lives was filled with reverence. What would our work lives be like? What would our families, our communities, our politics and our world be like if we could all value reverence as a top priority?

Reverence for Life

In 1993 a slim book called "Reverence for Life" was published, and a second edition came out in 2016. This is a collection of statements from Albert Schweitzer, the famous jungle doctor, that were culled from more than 50 years of his writings. "Reverence for Life" was the core philosophy of Schweitzer, who lived from 1875-1965. This little book is filled with powerful statements about the importance of reverence in relationships.

Here is a quote from page 9, which Schweitzer first said in an interview in 1959: "When we are truly filled with the idea of Reverence for Life, all our attitudes, thinking, actions change. We must go deep into ourselves to find inspiration. If we turn within, pondering our duty in this world in silence and act to move toward this goal, a change will come about. There are many opportunities to prove that we live in the spirit of the philosophy of Reverence for Life."

Since 1998, **DAN COUGHLIN** has worked with serious-minded leaders and executives to consistently deliver excellence. He provides executive coaching, leadership and executive development group coaching programs and seminars to improve leadership and management performance. His topics are personal effectiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, leadership, teamwork and management. Visit his free Business Performance Idea Center at www.thecoughlincompany.com.











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