



Restaurant owner gives half his business to employees

For Francis Marincola, giving part of his business to four of his long-term employees is the path to success.

The 72-year-old only needs to spend about 10 hours a week at his Delray Beach Italian restaurant, Caffe Luna Rosa.

"I would rather have an excellent functioning restaurant and take half the profit, than a restaurant that if I wanted it to be excellent functioning, I would have to be there all the time," he said.

Marincola turned over 50 percent of the popular restaurant in Delray Beach to these employees in return for their continued passion and dedication to his business.

He has been sharing profits to boost their performance for many years, but this year he decided to take it a step further.

"It was never meant that I was going to give half of the restaurant in writing away," Marincola said. "But I realized that if they got sick or wanted to retire or move away, they got nothing, and I thought that that was wrong after all those years they worked so hard to build the restaurant up."

The oceanfront Caffe Luna Rosa, in business since 1993, evolved from a take-out and gelateria to a casual dining restaurant with approximately 40 employees. Its offers breakfast, brunch and lunch with a menu consisting of salads, pastas, pizzas, wraps and more.

Marincola also said his business model has not only maximized profit, but minimized mistakes at the restaurant.

"The business advantage is obvious," Marincola said. "A normal person who doesn't own the business sometimes cares and sometimes doesn't."

Ernesto DeBlasi, executive chef for 10 years and one of the four new partners, agreed: "You tend to care a little bit more, you tend to pay more attention to detail, you are more attentive to profit and loss and the quality of the food."

DeBlasi and his three employee-co-owners are entitled to 50 percent of all profits — in addition to their salaries. They also participate in every decision made at the restaurant.

Ownership means financial stability to Bonnie Beer, office manager and bookkeeper for 12 years at Caffè Luna Rosa.

"This means security for my family," said Beer, mother of two young children. "It gives me security knowing that my kids' college will be paid for when they get older."

Mercedes LaRue, a small business expert, said awarding ownership to employees is a good way to keep valuable workers, who are essential to a successful business. LaRue is the director of the institute for family businesses at the Eugenio Pino and Family Global Entrepreneurship Center at Florida International University.

Beer, DeBlasi and the other two owners, the day manager and the morning head chef, are proof of that. All have been at the restaurant for more than a decade.

Beer and DeBlasi said ownership and compensation are keys to their longevity at the restaurant.

"It's a good business strategy," DeBlasi said.

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