

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



709 How to Make Your Business Legendary – Part 3

Building a business that inspires almost unheard of loyalty in customers. How do you do it? I'm Jerry Roberts, and today, the words of someone who was a part of just such a business will guide us to the answer. That's next, on The Extra Point.

When one of Guam's legendary eateries, Linda's Coffee Shop, announced it was closing its doors, the public reaction showed how much the restaurant had meant to island residents over the years.

The first two installments of this conversation dealt with several ways a business can give customers a reason to develop a close relationship with a company and its employees. You can download those, Extra Points #707 and 708, from guamtraining.com.

The final point is one that only a few companies ever achieve, and it goes beyond mere words like customer service and relationship. It's another level. I wanted to ask someone who lived it, because that would make it more meaningful. One of my wife's former classmates is married to Rudy Cruz, whose parents opened up a Barrigada-based food business in 1970, and they called it Cool Spot.

Cool Spot, where Happy Mart now resides, was a favorite place of mine, back when I ate meat. The food came out quick, tasted great, and it was inexpensive. On top of that, the man that ran it, Mr. Cruz, whom they called Pop, always had a big, wide smile for his customers. The servings were good sized, but never bigger than the friendliness they came with.

The whole Cruz family worked the business, even grand kids and in-laws playing a part. Rudy worked after school, then cleaned up at closing time, and got to bed late. He never made it to his homeroom class at GW, but he was excused by the administrators because they had seen what he was doing. You see,

they were Cool Spot customers, too.

His mom and dad opened up at 5:00 a.m., every day, and stayed past midnight, never complaining of being tired. Rudy said all the kids learned their work ethic from the example displayed by his parents.

The food was all home made and there was a lot of prep work. That meant hand-patting the burger, rolling the lumpia, chopping and slicing vegetables — and Pop marinated the ribs and chicken. The routine was the same, day-in and day-out.

Rudy mentioned the "Big Boy" burger, and said people still talk about it when they see him, 24 years after Cool Spot closed. There was more, and if you ate there, maybe you remember the fiesta plates, taco salad, soups, chop steak, and "fall off the bone ribs". I'm sure I had it all.

We've spoken of the need for consistency, and I don't ever recall being disappointed by anything I ate from Cool Spot.

I asked Rudy for memories on why he felt his family business was successful. Besides what we've mentioned so far, what was the secret? I'm going to quote directly from what he told me, and you pull from it what you will.

From Rudy Cruz: "Hard work. Respect. Honesty. Be kind to people. Thank God for everything you have. Give and it will come back to you." He said his parents were very generous.

Again, quoting Rudy: "If people didn't have enough money to pay for their order, Pop would tell them, 'It's okay, come back and pay when you have it.' At the end of the day if someone came by and said they were hungry, Pop would give them a plate of chicken, and then apologize that it was cold.

(Con't.)

He would give the leftover ice cream, poured into the ice cream carton, so it wouldn't go to waste."

The giving went beyond feeding folks when they couldn't pay. They donated as much as they could when people asked, whether it was food, paper products, or money. Between the giving and how they treated people, the community took notice.

A side note. In those years, theft and burglary were regular parts of island life, with an epidemic of drug use driving a never-ending rash of crime. My place was broken into, and many people I knew had lost things. Rudy said something that was surprising. "Out of all the businesses around us," he said, "We never got robbed. Our only alarm system was the boonie dogs that stayed by the back door. There were times my parents forgot to lock the doors. Nothing was disturbed when they came back in the morning."

They took care of people, which was well known, and even the bad guys left them alone.

So, you want to build a business that will stand the test of time, and make people mourn the loss when you have to close it?

It starts with top-notch products and services, delivered consistently, by employees who think of your place as their home, and coworkers and customers as family. Give them the authority to make things right with customers, if things ever go wrong. Don't make big changes to what people love about you, always keeping your loyal customers top of mind.

Finally, give back, in ways that only your heart can tell you is right. Pour that heart and soul into your business, your workers, and your customers. Make them feel special. Do it for years, and then years more. All in all, be grateful to God that you've had the chance to do it.

Will your business be legendary one day? I don't know. I only know that if you do all these things, you've got a shot at it — and that's a good thing. I think Rudy Cruz, of the legendary Cool Spot, would agree.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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