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## Bakery Manager, Dave Harris, discusses his success with Baking Management

Feb 1, 2009 12:00 PM

Dave Harris, president, The Original Bagel Co., West Caldwell, N.J., fosters pride in his employees and encourages them to share in quality ownership.

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Baking Management: What in your past experience has made you a good leader?

Dave Harris: I'm humbled your magazine considers me a good leader, so I appreciate even being asked the question. Here's a good story: The summer before college, my dad brought me to the local airport for private pilot lessons. When it was time for my first solo cross-country, my dad, a licensed pilot, gave me one simple piece of advice; if you're lost, turn 180° and come back home to try again another time. From that experience I learned it's important to train and set big goals that forge new ground. As a leader at Original Bagel, I want every employee to try new things knowing that it's OK to fail.



Dave Harris

BM: What core values help you successfully manage your bakery?

DH: It's important to me that I have a completely honest and open dialogue about our business. Everyone has the freedom to express their opinions to me directly, and I will listen and take immediate action if it's warranted. Next, every person at the bakery is entitled to equal respect for the hard work they do, regardless of their job title. Lastly, all business will be conducted above board. About a year ago, an employee came to me with an "opportunity" to buy some inexpensive used parts we needed in the bakery. While he could guarantee me quick delivery of the parts, he could not provide me with a receipt from the seller. I quickly told the employee I wasn't interested unless I could call the seller myself and verify the sale was legitimate. I was never able to do so, and the employee no longer works at Original Bagel. The message to all of our employees was clear.

BM: How can a stable workforce best be managed?

DH: Original Bagel's goal for our employees is to understand exactly what it is they are responsible for without micromanaging every action. Because jobs are clearly defined, it's amazing how you can simply let personal pride take over. We also have become obsessed with measuring every area of our business. The old management adage "you can't manage what you don't measure" is 100 percent true.

BM: What strategies have you implemented to deal with the current economic

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situation?

DH: I was pleased by the outcome of a management-only pay decrease. We'd never had a pay cut in our history, so I was fearful at how it would be taken. My partner Bruce Levenbrook, C.E.O. of the company, suggested instead of just cutting random dollar amounts, we should do an across the board 10 percent decrease for everyone, so it eliminated any concern of unfairness. It was the right move. Because everyone knew we were all sharing the pain equally, everyone pulled together and worked smarter and harder to get us back on track faster than I even imagined. We recently brought those salaries back up 5 percent and hope to bring back the other 5 percent soon.

In many ways, the commodities crisis a year ago helped to prepare us for the current economic situation. I'm happy to say Original Bagel's doing well and our future is bright. The reason we've thrived is because our employees embrace hard work, find unique solutions to inevitable issues and take personal pride in our final product.

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