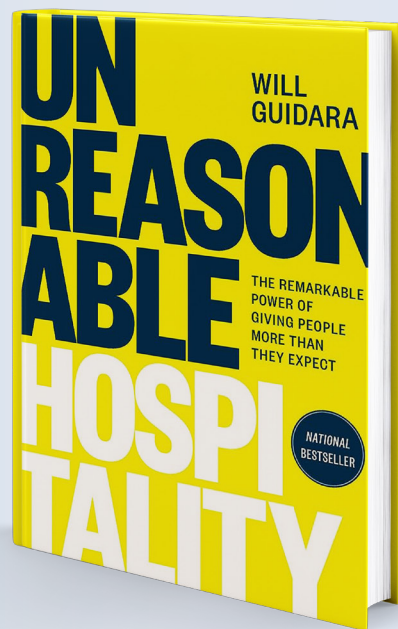


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Unreasonable Hospitality

The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect

By Will Guidara

Will Guidara is the founder of Thank You, a hospitality company that develops world-class destinations and helps leaders across industries transform their approach to customer service. He is a former co-owner of Eleven Madison Park and the NoMad, and is the cofounder of the Welcome Conference, an annual hospitality symposium. He has coauthored four cookbooks, was named one of Crain's New York Business's 40 Under 40, and is a recipient of WSJ Magazine's Innovator Award. He lives in the Hudson Valley with his wife, Christina, and their daughter, Frankie.

Lessons In Hospitality for Every Business

Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect is Will Guidara's book about the importance of hospitality in the restaurant industry, but he hopes that his message will resonate with readers from across all industries, both those serving the public and those serving other businesses. Through his years in the restaurant industry, Guidara has found great meaning in going to extreme measures to make people feel welcomed and appreciated, both his guests and his employees. Viewed through this lens, he views being able to serve people as an honor, a noble endeavor. *Unreasonable Hospitality* walks Guidara's readers through his many years in the hospitality industry, leaving the reader with wisdom he gleaned along the way. His book sets out to demonstrate to others how this unreasonable hospitality can completely change a business for the better.

Guidara opens his book with an event that he and his partner, Daniel Humm, considered a failure. Their restaurant had been named one of the world's 50 best restaurants, but when they arrived at the ceremony, they learned that they came in 50th place. Despite the honor that being named to the list was, the two had been hoping for a better placement their first time on the list and left the ceremony feeling disappointed. What Guidara learned from this experience was that even though their restaurant, Eleven Madison Park, was truly an excellent establishment, it had yet to do anything revolutionary. Guidara realized that most of the restaurants higher on the list excelled at innovation. What he wanted to excel at, however, was how his restaurant takes care of people. To him, hospitality means going far beyond just doing a competent and efficient job. It is about making people feel spectacular and forging a true connection, and this is what he set about doing. For Guidara, this type of service is selfish because it makes him feel wonderful being able to serve people in this way. Because of this, when unreasonable hospitality is employed, the employee, the business, and the customer all thrive.

Hospitality

Guidara grew up in the world of hospitality. His parents met while they were both in the hospitality industry, and Guidara graduated from the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell. His mother became a quadriplegic due to brain cancer, and he

remarks in his book about a meal he had shortly after his mother died when the chef invited him and his dad into a special private dining room overlooking the kitchen. Despite the night being the saddest of Guidara's life, he still had one of the best evenings of his life thanks to the hospitality of that chef. This event showed him "how important, how noble, working in service can be."

Guidara goes on to explain how important it is to exhibit hospitality to a person's employees. He explains the philosophy of restaurateur Danny Meyer who believes in Enlightened Hospitality or the act of prioritizing employees over all else. Meyer believes that if a business takes care of its employees then those employees will take care of everybody else. Guidara goes on to explain how important intentionality always was to his father, a man he exhibits great respect for. By intentionality, Guidara "means every decision, from the most obviously significant to the seemingly mundane matters."

Upon graduation from Cornell, one of Meyers partners, Richard Coraine, offered Guidara a job, and Guidara's father urged him to take the position explaining that it is easier to learn to do things the right way the first time around than to break harmful habits. He could learn these enlightened ways from Coraine's business. Guidara talks about lessons he learned when he first entered the business. One of these lessons is to embrace optimism and to try to infect a room with your own energy rather than let the energy in a room influence you. He remembers a time when the general manager, Randy Garutti, gave him the keys to have him close up one night. This helped instill in Guidara a sense of ownership over the establishment and allowed Guidara to know that he was trusted. He tries to give his own employees these same two graces. He also discusses the importance of a shared language between employees engaged in an enterprise.

Restaurant Versus Corporate Smarts

In his next chapter, Guidara compares restaurant smarts to corporate smarts. At his job at the time, Guidara was being educated in restaurant smarts. This type of smarts prizes creativity and autonomy and places hospitality at the center. It can sometimes be in opposition to corporate smarts which frequently prizes control and can sometimes stifle creativity while prioritizing business acumen. While learning about corporate smarts at this new job with Restaurant Associates, Guidara learned how important profit and loss statements are, and he excitedly anticipated the day he could get his hands on them. Both restaurant smarts and corporate smarts are important in running a successful restaurant, and Guidara maintains that "creativity was going to be the main ingredient in striking a true balance between restaurant-smart and corporate-smart." To walk this line, Guidara works by the 95/5 principle in which 95% of a business is financially managed very closely, and 5% is managed extravagantly. This 5% is important to Guidara because he believes that it is here where the greatest impact is made.

Building a Team

Guidara began to get frustrated by the pull between the cooking

staff and the dining room staff that frequently occurs at restaurants and in which the dining room staff are less respected than those who work in the back. Guidara realized that while the food is very important, so is the service aspect of a restaurant. Guidara was offered a position at Eleven Madison Park as the general manager, but he was hesitant to take the position because he did not believe he wanted to work in more fine dining establishments in no small part because the chef was often so far exalted among other employees. He met with the chef, Daniel Humm, and they decided to have "open communication between the kitchen and the dining room staff." They decided that both the front end and the back end would run the restaurant. They believed they could create an organization that could do both what is best for the food and for the service.

What Guidara and Humm set out to achieve was a cool restaurant, one that married excellence with fun. Guidara quickly learned that there were tensions at EMP between the employees who had been there for years and the newer employees. The older employees were used to a more relaxed environment than the newer ones who mainly came from fine dining establishments. Guidara realized that he needed to get the more established employees on board with his new plan, and this required communication and consistency. Guidara relied on his principle of taking care of his people to do this. He started out his tenure by listening to all members of his team. Then he worked on locating the strengths of all of those team members. He worked on giving both ample praise and correction, but the latter was given with little emotion and in private. He believes both types of feedback need to be constantly given. He also instituted thirty minute meetings every day. He believes that these meetings are crucial in creating cohesive teams. They are one of his ways of treating his employees with hospitality.

Guidara believes in the importance of good training and rules as long as they are sensible and help an organization move forward. To him, tradition is no reason to continue doing something a certain way if it is no longer working for the people or their organization. Genuine relationships are a key aspect to the service profession, and sometimes these relationships require breaking down barriers.

When hiring people, Guidara started to recognize that servers who came from the world of fine dining often had hard habits to break. What he was looking for was people who demonstrated true hospitality who find a reward in making a person's day better. Hiring is important, he maintains, because in the process of hiring a person, the manager is hiring someone who will represent and support both the manager and the entire team. Because of this, Guidara is a proponent of hiring slowly. He started a practice of hiring multiple people at a time and treating them as a class that can grow together and help one another. He maintains that while it is unenjoyable to be short handed, it is better to be short handed for a bit and then hire an exceptional person than to hire someone who will not be good for the organization in the long term. Guidara looks to make caring cool in his organization. He wants employees who get excited about being really invested in their work and in the company. This passion, vulnerability, and enthusiasm is key to Guidara.



[People] can give up trying to achieve perfection, or they can get as close to it as they possibly can.”

Guidara believes it is important to give all people a sense of ownership over their place of employment. To facilitate this, his restaurant starts every new employee out working at least temporarily as a food runner. This allows employees the opportunity to see the business from a different perspective. Guidara and his colleagues instituted ownership programs whereby employees are given specific challenges the restaurant faces and are tasked with figuring out a way to make the systems work better. While these programs initially take a lot of work to oversee, Guidara believes the time is worth it. Through this program, people are able to solve problems, save money, and become more invested in their workplace. Guidara is a firm believer in giving people more responsibility “before they’re ready” because most people will live up to the challenge. He also gives his employees the opportunity to teach classes to the rest of the staff about issues that are important to them and that they are knowledgeable about. Guidara believes in the importance of investing in his teams. People cannot perform well if they are not filled up themselves. Therefore, at times he has had to realize that he has to scale back on his plans if he wants to maintain the morale of his employees.

Perfection

Guidara goes on to discuss excellence and perfection. He understands that perfection is unattainable, but he believes there are two roads people can take with that knowledge. They can give up trying to achieve perfection, or they can get as close to it as they possibly can. He chooses the latter. In his team, they “chased excellence in every element of what we did.” This is important because “that precision in the smallest of details translated to precision in the bigger ones.” In other words, excellence in the small things matters. Guidara believes that excellence becomes evident when employees are promoted within to ever higher roles, and he also makes it a priority to promote from within rather than from outside the organization.

A Culture of Respect

Guidara allows that when everyone is invested in excellence, disagreements are bound to arise. He also maintains, however, that people have to care for one another while they also care about the business’s mission. His company’s rule is to never go to bed angry. While he admits that this advice does not always work in marriages, he believes it is important that employees do not leave work still angry with each other, and he thinks a key part of this is listening to the other person. When two people cannot come to an agreement, he believes it is often important for the wishes of the person who cares more about the issue to win out.

Guidara believes that both affirmation and criticism are important for those in positions of leadership. Many people enjoy giving

out affirmation, and he insists that when people are praised for the work of their team that they direct that praise to the appropriate team member. Criticism, maintains Guidara, is an investment in another’s work. It helps an employee become better. Guidara also believes in the importance of a leader apologizing and showing vulnerability to team members in order to gain trust.

Towards the end of his book, Guidara goes back to his principle from the beginning: unreasonable hospitality. He works hard to make every aspect of his guests’ experience excellent. One example of this is eliminating the podium at the door and scouring the internet for pictures of guests before they arrive, so his employees can greet the guests by name, without a podium and an iPad between them. He relays numerous instances in which he and his staff went far beyond guest expectations in both large and small ways that made the dining experience truly memorable for those dining at his restaurant. He hires people whose specific job is to create unique experiences for guests, calling these experiences Legends. Performing these Legends frequently benefits the employee as much as the guest because employees delight in the feeling of joy they are able to impart. Guidara cautions his reader against worshipping practicality. Often he says a person should not focus first on practicality and instead should focus on how to make dreams a reality.

Eventually Guidara and Humm worked their way through the ranks of the best 50 restaurants, finally achieving their coveted number one spot. Throughout his book, Guidara attempts to share his secrets to success with his readers in order to allow them to apply the same principles of his success to their own endeavors. In what reads like a narrative, Guidara’s readers are given a blueprint laying out the most important ingredients for the culture Guidara and his company attempted and succeeded at fostering. In this way, Guidara’s book is relevant to anybody trying to create a respectful, human-focused culture centered around the principle of excellence.

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