



10 TRAITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL BARISTAS

BY THE BRAND COACHES

Just like there are vast differences in specialty coffees, there are vast differences in baristas.

The crop of superb baristas is huge in the mature Northwest specialty coffee market. But, the first major hurdle we usually face to help clients lift their daily sales from the midwest to the east coast are finding and training great baristas.

We dash into their businesses for a brand audit and come eye-to-eye with lackluster baristas who are about as exciting as CNN on a Saturday afternoon. The owner typically flinches at the low scores they find on our audits and quickly stammer, “Good baristas are really hard to find.”

Before we say anything else, it is important to be aware of a crucial fact: There are potentially great baristas on every corner of every large and small town across America. No exceptions.

The assumption that there are too few great baristas in your market means you are looking to hire a barista with barista experience.

Wrong call.

In fact, it is harder to train your new barista with former experience and entrenched good and bad habits, than it is to hire someone totally outside the coffee industry. What you are looking for is brightness in personality and attitude, and the perfect fit for your highly defined company culture.

Okay, so you don't have a “highly defined company culture.” Before running you through the ten traits list, we'd better stop the music right here and give you a wake up call: You can't grow great baristas without a great working environment. With a highly defined and daily-energized culture, every one of your employees shares an owner's pride in their brand and mission.

Underpinning company pride are formal training programs for consistent customer relationship marketing (not customer service) and premier quality beverage preparation. Note that we place customer relationship marketing ahead of beverage preparation. Most coffee café and drive thru owners and barista trainers either ignore customer relationship marketing, or breeze

through it without even role playing how to effectively capture the hearts and loyalty of potential customers.

Speaking of your company's main barista trainers, they are usually at the core of the problem in creating a team of baristas that always exceed customer expectations. Too often, this unyielding company trainer teaches everything their way, based on their own past barista experience. Right way be damned, it's their way or the highway.

Don't limit your barista's potential by relying on a company trainer who isn't open to the latest training program offerings. Resources beyond your barista trainer's personal experience include Bellissimo's DVD, "Espresso 101" (www.espresso101.com); select micro roaster custom training programs; and hands-on barista trainers to train your trainer.

Attend any one of the three Coffee Fest seminars held on the west and east coast each year and you can acquire a treasure chest of training tools to craft your own professional barista training program.

Now that we have touched on the action you, as the owner, need to do to build the best barista team in town, let's jump right into those ten precious traits to look for in a potential barista. Remember, with the right baristas, you can turn your business from bland to a killer brand.

TOP 10 TRAITS OF A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL BARISTA

1. CUSTOMERS COME FIRST

A great barista is empowered to always put the customer's desires and concerns first. Like a Nordstrom sales professional, the highly successful barista can act right now to correct what is wrong without having to turn to management or delay action based on a rigid policy.

2. ATTITUDE / PERSONALITY

A great barista always comes to work with a fresh start attitude. They put all personal feelings aside and step into the customer relationship marketing zone. Specialty coffee is a relationship driven business. Customers are not only there for the great coffee, but also an inviting and caring experience.

3. APPEARANCE

This is not to say that you have to be a "hottie" to work as a barista, but it is important that general appearance is smart and professional. The best baristas wear a sharp apron and uniform shirt that proudly reflects a professional brand and an expectation of quality consistency. General hygiene is super important as well as dress code. The best baristas don't allow underwear or their bare midriff to show, or reveal tattoos. Of course, great baristas are never seen smoking on break.

4. TRAINING

Great baristas never stop their quest to learn more about coffee, from origin to blends. There are so many things to learn about coffee, that continually educating themselves in the industry instantly separates them from a minimum wage mentality and defines them as a professional. A great barista becomes a master at latte art and the ability to taste coffee often enough to recognize and describe subtle differences.

5. TEAMWORK

The perfect barista works well in a team environment, always looking for ways to serve fellow staff members, as well as satisfy customers beyond their expectations. Customers can tell when the rhythm between two co-workers isn't smooth. This can affect the overall business as well as your daily tips. They always seem to be having fun. They love their job and their co-workers.

6. OWNERSHIP

The highly successful barista doesn't look at being a barista as just a job. Because of the nurturing and inclusive way the business owner treats them, they take an owner's pride in the business. Customers instantly pick up on the way the baristas speak about "their" company.

7. UP-SELLING

The perfect barista is familiar with every beverage on the menu, by ingredients and taste. They take pride in continually introducing patrons and new customers to something different. Their genuine enthusiasm and love of the product they are recommending instantly creates an open curiosity and willingness from the customer to break away from the regular for something different.

8. MEMORY

The highly successful barista knows far more about their customers than their favorite drink. Nobody walks into their business a stranger and walks out a stranger. They are quick to read customer moods, lifestyles and how they should tailor their conversation every time they share the experience of serving them. They have a knack for knowing just how far to delve into each customer's personal life to insure they are creating a genuine relationship. The business owner first must model this caring customer behavior for any exceptional barista to fully embrace each customer as a friend.

9. QUALITY

Great baristas have to believe in the superior quality of all of the products they serve, starting with your coffee. Because they know, as an owner, you only procure and serve the best of everything, they can speak with pride in never selling, but sharing the best of the best with their customers. Compromise quality for price and you will never gain the benefit of a highly successful barista.

10. MULTI-TASKING

The perfect barista has mastered multi-tasking. All too often they are pulling shots, steaming milk and taking other orders while making the customer they are serving feel special.

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