

Cover Story

Tom Sacco

Crafting "Happy Places" and Magical Memories in the Pizza Industry

Chief Happiness Officer, CEO & President at Happy Joe's Pizza,

CEO & President at Tony Sacco's Coal Oven Kitchen



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In a candid interview with Tom Sacco, the Chief Happiness Officer, CEO, and President at Happy Joe's Pizza and Tony Sacco's Coal Oven Kitchen, we explore his multi-faceted role, the concept of leading with a "Servant's Heart" in today's restaurant industry, and the key factors contributing to Happy Joe's success.

Overview of Role and Vision:

Tom Sacco's role involves strategically positioning Happy Joe's Pizza and Tony Sacco's Coal Oven Kitchen as leaders in their respective pizza industry sub-segments. From menu innovation to international expansion, Tom focuses on creating "Happy Places" for families with young children through a holistic approach encompassing food, design, technology, and community involvement.

Chief Happiness Officer Concept:

The concept of being a "Chief Happiness Officer" is rooted in leading with a Servant's Heart. Tom's vision revolves around creating "Happy Places" for both children and adults. The focus is on serving others through food, design, hospitality, and community engagement, ensuring guests, staff, and vendors are prioritized.

Key Factors for Success:

Happy Joe's Pizza has garnered numerous recognitions and rankings. According to Tom, the success is attributed to returning to the Franchisee First approach Focusing on the fundamentals, executing great tasting food, extending "Best-in-Class" hospitality, developing unique recipes, and creating magical memories for the guests. Staying relevant, accommodating, and resonating with today's consumers, especially moms, is another key factor.



Servant's Heart in Expansion:

Leading with a Servant's Heart is pivotal in the brand's expansion strategy. Creating positive, "Happy" experiences for children globally is not only a positive influence but also extends to philanthropy, benefiting less fortunate children in the communities Happy Joe's expands into.

People Development and Mentorship:

Tom's approach to people development is unique—he prioritizes attitude and character over skills. Leading with a Servant's Heart, he believes in teaching skills to gain experience while emphasizing the importance of hiring people that bring passion, a Servant's Heart, and a Warrior Spirit which allows them to put the team, guests, and vendors first. Tom builds open, candid, trusting relationships with his guests, team, franchisee, vendors, shareholders. Everything and anything can be openly and frankly discussed.

Innovation in Menu Development:

Being a student of the industry, Tom stays innovative by observing, listening, studying, and tasting. Having a good streak of predicting consumer preferences, he humbly attributes his success in menu ideation to a combination of luck and understanding guest preferences.

Driving Revenue Lessons:

Listening to your guests and delivering 110% of what they want, whether it is menu items, hours of operation, pricing concerns, service and hospitality, and then give them more than they expected are the lessons Tom has learned over time have resulted in significant sales and profit increases along with improved shareholder valuations. Guest satisfaction is the key driver, and providing the best version of what the guest wants consistently leads to revenue growth.

Grandfather's Influence:

Tom's grandfather, Tony Sacco, imparted simple yet profound advice in mentoring and teaching his grandson in the kitchen of his restaurant—focus on quality be it in food, service, experience, and memories. Tom lives by this advice daily, shaping his business strategy around maintaining the highest quality in all aspects has been a successful formula for 40 years.

Balancing Family and Career:

Balancing family-focused life with a demanding executive career became easier for Tom as he learned from his life partner, Gwen. Her mentoring and direction helped him understand the importance of balancing family and career, making him a better leader, a compassionate warrior, and strong family man.

Crucial Skill for Success:

Among various skills, Tom considers people skills as the most crucial for ensuring success and growth. Collaborating with others, overcoming challenges, listening to the input of others, and collectively achieving goals are guided by his effective people skills.

Transformational Change Management:

Tom shares a transformative experience in turning around a struggling national brand or growing an emerging brand. By listening to his franchise owners, restaurant operators, and implementing a comprehensive plan based on their input and Tom identifying the critical elements that needed to be modified, transformed, and improved, his brands have made significant strides going from losses to growing profits, ultimately succeeding in highly challenging situations.





Priorities for Happy Joe's Expansion:

As Happy Joe's pizza and Ice cream expands across North America as well as Internationally, Tom's priorities are to maintain "Best-in-Class" status, staying franchisee First-Focused, ensuring sustained excellence. Growth initiatives are aligned with sustaining excellence, emphasizing a much higher calling which is the creation of magical, memorable experiences for children driving the top and bottom lines.

Future Trends in the Restaurant Industry:

Tom foresees the restaurant industry continuing to evolve based on consumer changing demands, with a focus on where, when, what, and why people choose to eat out. Automation might play a bigger role in addressing labour challenges, positively impacting the industry.



Connecting Emotionally with Guests:

In an industry often transactional, Happy Joe's addresses the challenge of emotional connection. Training team members to read the room, engage emotionally, and go above and beyond creates positive, memorable experiences that resonate with guests of all ages.

Advice for Aspiring Leaders:

Tom's advice for aspiring leaders is to enter the industry with a passion for service, leading with a Servant's Heart. Your Passion, Servant's Heart, and Warrior Spirit should guide one's journey. Staying true to these values will contribute positively to the industry's future and help you fulfil your own.

Closing Thoughts on Happy Joe's Legacy:

In closing, Tom expresses a hope that Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice cream will be recognized for the magical memories created for families and children worldwide. Selling more than great pizza, Happy Joe's aims to be remembered for the joy and happiness it has brought to generations, not just great pizza & Ice cream.

Tom Sacco's journey exemplifies a commitment to service, leadership with a Servant's Heart, and a legacy of creating "Happy Places" and magical memories in the pizza industry.