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Smart Leaders Shake it up

How to embrace change

Jim Rudolph
CEO, Rita's Water Ice Franchise Co. LLC

By **Matt McClellan**
Smart Business Philadelphia | March 2008



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Jim Rudolph doesn't just want to solve problems, he wants to fix them. The chairman and CEO of Rita's Water Ice Franchising Co. LLC says the difference between simply solving a problem and really fixing it can be the difference between a successful business and an unsuccessful one.

For instance, if a restaurant serves you a bad meal, then picks up the check, it has solved the problem. However, the next guest may get a bad meal, too, because the problem hasn't been fixed.

Rudolph developed this philosophy during his years as a franchisee when, beginning in 1976, his family developed and operated 47 Wendy's stores in the Greater Pittsburgh area. That experience helped him lead Rita's, an Italian ice chain to exponential growth, and today, Rita's has more than 470 locations in 15 states and revenue of more than \$240 million.

Smart Business spoke with Rudolph about why he wants his employees to be like turtles.

Be a risk-taker. When you think of a turtle, you think of an animal that moves slow. That's true, but we have another understanding of the turtle.

In our opinion, a turtle is an animal that takes a risk. Every time they stick their head out, they're taking a risk.

We want to have turtles. We want people to take a risk. We want people thinking outside the box and doing something different, because if we don't, we're going to keep doing the same thing. And if we keep doing the same, we're going to get the same results, and that's not acceptable.

Challenge your employees. You have to make your employees feel like they are a part of it. Today, particularly, people want to be given a reason for why they do what they do. We as managers have to do two things with our people. No. 1, we need to challenge them, and No. 2, we need to compensate them. It's very important to challenge people because if they're not being challenged, they're going to get bored. And if they're bored, they're not going to enjoy it.

Challenge them by setting goals and objectives. Find out what they need to do, find out what we want them to do, and then measure and manage them from that. Where are you, and what do you need to be? What do we need to do to go forward here?

Get the facts, then sell the concept.

I have a tremendous commitment to people. I learned this from Dave Thomas early on. He used to tell us, you're not in the hamburger business; you're in the people business. That is absolutely the key, and I say that every day.

People are our most important asset, and without them, we're not going to make it. So you need to think, 'What do I need to do to help my people?'

I don't have all the answers. So I listen. I have two ears and one mouth. By listening to my people, I'll be able to create a vision with them of where we want to go.

I don't tell people what to do; I convince people. I sell people. My wife says it all the time, 'You convinced me to marry you.'

It's the same thing with trying to get people to support us. I use three words. You have to believe us, trust us and respect us. Because as a franchisee, I believed the franchisor, and I trusted them and respected them.

So how do I convince them? By showing them where we are and why do I think this and why do we want to do this. And if I'm wrong, tell me! I'm open to it. Every idea we come up with is not right. But I'm willing to listen. Actually, I get the best ideas from my employees.

Embrace change. I had two objectives when I walked in here. One was changing the culture of this organization. Two was changing the culture of the franchise partners.



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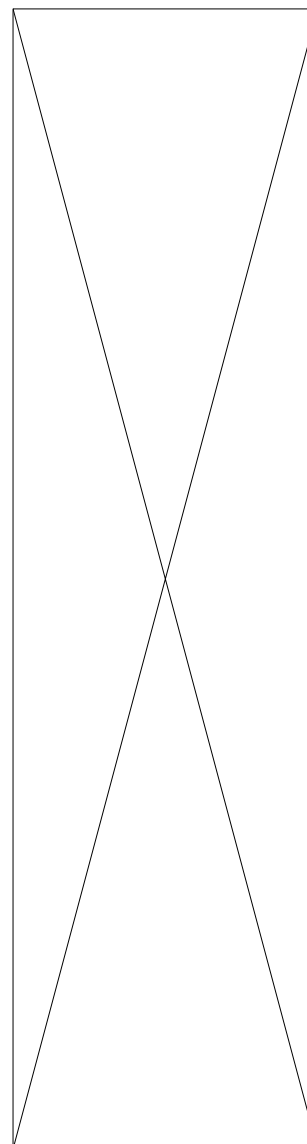
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It's all about the culture. I've got a great saying up on my wall. A culture is created by what you expect. You have to let them know what the expectations are and be excited to hear back from them.

You have a cell phone, so every time you get a new one, is that easy to learn? No, never. Change is difficult.

If it was me by myself alone, OK, I can handle that. But it's not about me, it's about the people. So it's about making sure that the people understand where we are and where we're going on a continuous basis.

As much as I work at it and communicate it, I still find people behind me. So it's constant communication, I'm not sure I'm succeeding all the time. But it's what I think about all the time.

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