



## Facilitator — Aug./Sept. 2012



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### ONE LOVE!

R. V. Baugus

Raising Cane's LLC, has built its entrepreneurial success story on the foundation of a fun work culture coupled with a menu that is focused on selling a single item and selling it better than anyone else.

Suffice it to say that Raising Cane's—or just Cane's as it is commonly known—has created a workplace culture built on individuality and attitude. As for the restaurant menu, it is short on bells and whistles but generous on the fresh-never-frozen goodness of chicken fingers as the staple item that leaves customers coming back for more.

And do they ever come back for more! A sign in the company's Plano, Texas, office displays a countdown to the next restaurant's opening in Houston. It is a sight soon to be repeated over and over as the company founded in 1996 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, by a persistent entrepreneur named Todd Graves, continues to grow with designs to become a billion dollar corporation by 2020.

The less-is-more philosophy is one that goes against the grain of restaurant menu options these days when most establishments are scurrying to discover what new item can be added as an offering. It is actually the same philosophy that Cane's employs as it surveys its future location growth spots.

"Raising Cane's is committed to growth, but only as fast as we can continue to do it the right way." said Sean Bishop, Director of Facilities. "We could grow 100 restaurants a year but it's not necessarily right for us. We want to make sure we can attract great people and that the team is ready for growth. Finding great people is one of the most challenging pieces of our business. You've seen it in most every other restaurant chain you've been to. As you walk out and say, 'Oh, my gosh, that person does not belong in hospitality.'"

#### First, The Food

The slogan of ONE LOVE® says it all when describing what Cane's sells: quality chicken finger meals. The Box Combo featuring four chicken fingers, thin crinkle-cut fries, coleslaw, Cane's sauce, thick-sliced Texas Toast and a regular drink is considered the signature meal.

This year alone Cane's will serve up 15 million pounds of chicken, 14 million pounds of potatoes, 1.5 million pounds of diced cabbage and an untold amount of dipping sauce. But don't expect to see a dessert or other extraneous items. "Todd has a vision, and the entire team is committed to support that vision," Bishop said.

That vision was conceived after Graves graduated from the University of Georgia and moved back home to Baton Rouge, La. He teamed with a buddy Craig Silvey to submit a business plan for one of Silvey's classes at Louisiana State University. The plan was to introduce a restaurant concept based on selling chicken fingers and was met with a grade of B-minus, the lowest grade in the class.

Graves failed to convince bankers to loan him money to start his business. Undaunted, he went to work as an oil refinery boilermaker in California and then fishing for sockeye salmon in Bristol Bay in Alaska. After netting enough money from his work, raising funds from outside investors and securing an SBA loan, Graves renovated an old building in Baton Rouge and opened his first restaurant, one that made \$30 in profit the first month.

#### Then, The Growth

Since then business has been booming. The company's headquarters (known internally as the restaurant support office, RSO) opened in Baton Rouge and still exists there along with the newer Plano RSO.

Bishop, who started in the industry more than 20 years ago as a cook for Coco's Restaurants in California and since then has mostly worked on the facilities side, parlayed his extensive experience into building an award-winning facilities management team. One of the teams' claim to fame is the facilities management website, which he calls "one of our most useful tools," to help support their growing number of restaurants and managers in the field.

"If someone calls with a question, often I can direct them to our Facilities Management website," he added. "It is a great resource and for internal use only. We post our facilities programs and scopes of work so if a manager wants to ensure the landscaper is doing his job, the information is at their fingertips. They can also view copies of contracts and see manuals for all the equipment we specify. We share pictures of our recent projects, refreshes, best practices and handy tools to find colors and finishes used in their restaurant. It's our depository for everything facilities."

Bishop also calls bringing in Service Channel with its cloud-based software a big win. "We're able to manage all of our service calls, compare service providers by costs and how quickly they respond to calls and how efficiently they complete the work," he said.

As account manager with Service Channel for Cane's, AJ Steele said it is important to keep her client ahead of the game. "We provide Raising Cane's with a technology platform that enables them to maintain their brand integrity and drive significant ROI without adding staff or investing in new infrastructure as their business grows," she said.

Day-to-day work orders are handled through Service Channel but Bishop said it is still important for his team, which also includes a coordinator and two facility service managers, to physically inspect the work at restaurants. "We are the ones who really go out and look at the in-depth quality, especially following up on services such as HVAC preventative maintenance, refrigeration PMs, capital improvements, and other ad-hoc work," he said.

Bishop said that his group works closely with the design team and that the facilities group has a voice in design elements and specifications.

"The good news is that because we are still a small company and we act like one, there's not a lot of bureaucracy," he said. "If we find systemic issues with our restaurants or if we have ideas to improve an existing specification, our design team is completely open to our feedback and normally implements it into the latest design specification. Both of our teams are focused on the same goals, to build restaurants that will stand the test of time and provide us the best overall value."

#### Next, The Culture

When Todd Graves founded Raising Cane's, he had another idea that was just as important to him as being the place to go for chicken fingers. He wanted a workplace that rewarded production, was fun and where individuals could be, well, individuals.

For starters, the restaurant was named after his dog, Raising Cane, who was often roaming around the original restaurant during renovations. (Graves had thought of naming the restaurant after some variation of his sockeye salmon days in Alaska but wisely backed off.) After the dog passed away, Todd's wife, Gwen, surprised him with a yellow Labrador that is now known as Cane II, who in addition to serving as the restaurant's mascot is also a certified pet therapy dog. Hence, the company even offers pet insurance to its crewmembers as part of their benefits package.

The company also believes it is important for its Restaurant Support Office crewmembers to understand and appreciate the work of those in the restaurants. Look on the sleeve of Bishop's and any other office staff member's shirt and you will see the words "Fry Cook and Cashier." The words are not there by accident. Each and every employee, including those in the Restaurant Support Office, is trained to be a fry cook and a cashier.

"I had six weeks of training and worked my tail off," Bishop said. "After the first two days, my feet hurt so bad I had to go buy new shoes. I really wanted to be immersed in the experience. But, how could I understand the needs of my customers if I have never been a Raising Cane's restaurant crew member?"

"I've been in operations, but a good portion of the people here (in the office) have not run a restaurant, have not been a busboy, a dishwasher, a prep cook and they don't understand that when a manager has a crewmember call in sick, if another crewmember is late, or the produce delivery shorted you coleslaw. Sometimes we don't know or understand what kind of day a manager is having. This helps us better understand their need; it's a paradigm that every support center member understands."

Their shoes might often be found dancing on the restaurant floors, which is not only OK but encouraged as part of having fun. Every restaurant manager is also given creative license for verbiage on the outside marquees, within tasteful reason, of course.

In building his current facilities team, Bishop said that industry experience was not the sole factor in his hiring decisions.

"I interviewed many people that fit that qualification," he said. "What I hire for is attitude. I want the right attitude because I really believe that's what our success is about. I could teach facilities to almost anybody. I hire the attitude and train the skill. That's what I believe is going to deliver that 'WOW' experience to my customers."

The same emphasis on attitude is applicable to service providers. Bishop said that he has a select few national vendors and prefers working with local and regional vendors as a way to give back to the community. Even those, however, must be a good fit.

"We want to make sure they are the right partners for us," Bishop said. "Not only from a standpoint of capability, geography or price, but do they really fit our culture? An added bonus for using local and regional service providers is that when a local provider does work in a Cane's restaurant there is a good chance he will be back with his family in tow."

"When a technician comes in to work in our restaurants, he may never have been there before, but he'll realize 'this place is clean!'" Bishop said. "We get that comment a lot from our Service Providers. 'We love working on your equipment. It's always so clean. We can actually sit on the floor of your restaurant and work on the fryer because it's so clean on the floor.' Next thing you know he gets his wife and kids and says, 'Let's go to Cane's.'"

#### Finally, The Location

Pull up a map of restaurant locations around the country and you will notice a decided marking around major college towns. That is no accident for a restaurant that stays open until 3 a.m. and caters heavily to the college crowd. Bishop said that demographic is one of the restaurants' primary targets and thus where most restaurants are positioned.

Graves believes it is important to give back to the communities that support Cane's. Areas of emphasis for active community involvement include entrepreneurship, like Lemonade Day—a day designed for kids to learn how to start, own and operate their own lemonade stand, supporting local food shelters and working with Share Our Strength to stop child hunger, supporting pet welfare causes by opening local dog parks and supporting no-kill animal shelters, and lastly supporting an active lifestyle by building walking trails, parks and supporting races such as Komen Race for the Cure.

As the company continues to grow, Bishop covers the country with a coordinator and two facilities service managers, one based in Baton Rouge who covers most of Louisiana where Cane's restaurants are heavily populated, and one who covers restaurants in remote locations or have opened in new markets, such as Oklahoma and Mississippi. It is all part of making sure that the proper care and service is provided to the restaurants, which in turn ensures that happy customers keep coming back.

It is all about ONE LOVE, and it is an attitude and application that clearly has Raising Cane's fingers in it. Chicken fingers, that is.

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