



Limited-Service, Unlimited Possibilities

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The Ultimate Staff Reward

Auntie Anne's takes employee incentives to the extreme.



"Be the Boss" participants compete for a free Auntie Anne's franchise.

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entrepreneurs that will join our company to help us open stores and continue to serve our guests," he says. "It also gave us the opportunity to show individuals what it takes to become a franchise partner and ... the commitment and the support that we provide our franchise partners."

A move like this can also boost employee morale and even help attract high-caliber employees, says Andre Neyrey, CEO of Manhattan Restaurant Consultants.

"It's kind of like a win-win," Neyrey says about Auntie Anne's participation in the "Be the Boss" series, which airs the pretzel concept's episode on December 16. "The brand's going to do well, they're going to look better to their customer base, and they're also going to build some employee loyalty."

Though awarding a franchise unit to a deserving employee can be a great way to incentivize crewmembers, it can prove dangerous if the employee isn't an appropriate fit for the brand, says Jania Bailey, chief operating officer for FranNet, a franchise business consulting firm based in Louisville, Kentucky.

"There are a lot of good concepts out there, but that doesn't mean each of those concepts are the right concept for any given individual," she says. "You've got to really look at that individual's transferable skill set and whether or not what they're good at is what it takes to be successful in that franchise."

For example, some brands require franchisees to take on a heavy role in marketing and sales. For franchisees who struggle in this area of business, these concepts may not be the best match, Bailey says.

"You've got to make sure that the goals and their skill set are in alignment to be successful," she adds.

To guarantee the "Be the Boss" candidates were a good fit for Auntie Anne's and deserving of franchise ownership, the brand's executive team put them through a set of challenges that tested their skills, leadership abilities, and franchisee potential.

Some of these included hiring a team; developing a product and then selling it in the marketplace; and operating a unit during "load-in day," when all ingredients are shipped to the store.

"What a brand has to do is really make sure that the testing or the matching of the person is complete and it's thorough," Bailey says. "Because you definitely don't want to put somebody in business to fail."

Providing a new franchisee the proper corporate support is another potential concern that comes along with giving away a franchise location. To make sure the winning candidate has the necessary support, Dunn says, Auntie Anne's is treating the operator just like any other franchisee.

"This franchise agreement was awarded under unique circumstances," he admits. "However, we're treating it just like any other franchise process. It's from A to Z. It's the training that takes place here in Lancaster at Pretzel University, it's the franchise interview process, it's the site-selection process.

"Certainly, this opportunity is something that will change someone's life, so we want to make sure that we are ensuring their success," he adds.

FranNet's Bailey acknowledges that while there are certainly challenges that come with awarding an employee a franchise agreement, it can be a positive move when executed properly. In addition, the action itself and the support that follows can create an eternal brand evangelist.

"[Auntie Anne's is] giving a hand up—not a handout, a hand up—to someone that is deserving," she says. "This is probably going to be one of their most loyal franchisees going forward."

The experience was also a chance to recognize Auntie Anne's most hard-working employees. Dunn says the brand's franchisees and franchise business consultants recommended top-notch employees for the show, and a total of 80 employees went through the casting process with A&E.

"There were a lot of folks that were recognized for their efforts day in and day out and their commitment to not only Auntie Anne's, but also to their respective franchise partners and their families," he says.

Any seasoned brand, operator, or human-resources expert will tell you that rewarding your employees can bring about a host of positive results, from improved employee morale to better customer service.

But pretzel chain Auntie Anne's is taking employee incentives to a new level, awarding one deserving and unsuspecting employee not just a raise or promotion, but a franchise unit of his or her very own.

The brand is participating in A&E's newest reality TV show, "Be the Boss," a series in which two lower-level employees face off for what they think is a corporate promotion, with the winner becoming a franchise partner with the company.

Bill Dunn, president and chief operating officer for Lancaster, Pennsylvania-based Auntie Anne's, says the opportunity not only offered a marketing tool to get the quick-serve brand in front of thousands—even millions—of consumers, but also a way to bolster its franchising community.

"It's important, as we continue to grow, that we identify

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