

The Secret Ingredients of Successful Business Turnarounds

What could seasoned business executives possibly learn from a foul-mouthed, seemingly bi-polar, but nevertheless incredibly successful, celebrity chef? Quite a lot as it turns out. Each episode of Gordon Ramsay's hit television show, Kitchen Nightmares, is nothing less than a microcosm of business turnaround management, covering more or less the same process that management consultants use all the time for reversing the fortunes of troubled multinational corporations.

Each show starts with an introductory meeting between Ramsay and the star-struck owner and his staff. Following an initial exchange of pleasantries - where the hapless restaurateur explains his misfortune and gratefully pledges to place the future of his business in the experienced hands of our intrepid chef - the fun begins, as Ramsay sits down to enjoy his first meal. Whether through dumb luck, sheer brilliance, or, more likely, clever pre-screening by his production team, Ramsay invariably selects the one dish the restaurant's own chef doesn't know how to prepare, and, with that, our first "moment of truth" has arrived; increasingly nervous waitresses and a completely befuddled chef begin to panic as an obviously perturbed Ramsay takes a few bites, refuses to eat any further, and orders something else from the menu instead, usually with equally disastrous results.

Having established that the restaurant's poor financial results may at least in part be due to the owner and staff's own incompetence, instead of market forces beyond their control, chef Ramsay proceeds to create the proverbial "burning platform" for fundamental change. This is usually by far the most entertaining part of the show, when, spoiling for a good fight, Ramsay lets loose in a foul-mouthed tirade designed to positively scare the restaurant crew out of their collective wits - while simultaneously serving up a generous portion of "schadenfreude" to the television audience at home - but also with the desired effect of shaking the organization out of its ingrained bad habits: invariably the food is absolutely terrible, the ingredients artificial, the menu a joke, the restaurant concept incomprehensible, processes non-existent, and cleanliness so poor that, in the words of our chef, "people may die here tonight!"

With the initial Diagnostic phase completed, and the "need for change" established beyond a shadow of a doubt, Ramsay now sets out by himself to do some market and customer research. He walks around the neighbourhood, checking out "latent demand" for potential new restaurant concepts. Once a potentially more competitive value proposition has been identified, Ramsay and his team completely remodel the restaurant overnight to "shock and awe" the ecstatic owner and his staff. The new repositioning concept is explained, we get a tour of the newly remodelled restaurant, and anxiously await opening night. This is usually still touch-and-go, as the restaurant staff valiantly try to adapt to their new environment, but, with in-kitchen and on-the-floor help from the good chef himself, all ends well, and the show concludes with lots of hugs, kisses, and, of course, a tearful goodbye.

So there you have it - all the ingredients for a successful business turnaround are there: fresh market and customer research as the main ingredients, a main course of successfully repositioned products,

served in newly refurbished and rebranded facilities, all lovingly prepared on a clear mandate for fundamental change, and, of course, deliciously entertaining. Bon appetite and Merry Christmas!