

6 Leadership Principles I Learned from Running a Pizzeria



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The following is adapted from Unsliced.

Fifteen years ago, I started Andolini's Pizza in Tulsa, Oklahoma with my brother. Since then, I've learned a lot about the restaurant business, from budgeting and marketing to making the perfect pizza and choosing what chairs to buy.

I've also learned a great deal about leadership. It's key to growing a successful business. You need to have a good team around you—one that is motivated, hard-working, and cohesive. Many teams don't get that way without a good leader.

Running Andolini's has taught me six basic leadership principles that I want to share with you. Learn these principles, and you'll be on your way to being an excellent manager.

#1: Be Impressive or Be Seen As Unimpressive

If you just run through the motions and perform average work, you're dead in the water. It's the same thing with your staff. If any member of your staff is not working hard, you need to have a talk. Just talking about their goals with them can be all that it takes to turn them around.

Be an impressive manager and employee and set a good example for your staff. If you're not impressive, then you are, by default, unimpressive. Go the extra mile in everything you do, from the way you dress to the way you manage customer complaints.

You'll set an example for everyone else to do their best.

#2: Ambiguity Is The Enemy

If a staff member doesn't know where they stand with you, it makes them anxious, uneasy, and apathetic about their job. You may have no idea that a problem exists and think they're doing a great job, so you probably don't bother them. Meanwhile, the uncertainty grows.

Don't be a lazy leader, and don't assume anything. Overcommunicate and make sure that everything is fine. By getting in front of all issues and being assertive, you let staff know where they stand and what the goals are. Clear, direct, and consistent communication leads to clear expectations and good job performance.

#3: Lead with Facts, Not Emotion

You can't argue with facts. They get the point across quickly and directly. Emotions are rooted in opinion and hearsay, often causing debate and division.

Disagreements don't need to get emotional. Instead, address the facts of the problem and come to a rational decision. One effective way to help people grow through effective communication is to use the Socratic method. You have to learn how to do it, but it's an effective way to help the employee discover the solution on their own.

To use it, ask the employee questions about the situation to help them think critically and draw out ideas on their own instead of telling them yourself. The employee will arrive at a resolution themselves, which is a lot easier than you convincing them what's right.

#4: Perception is Reality

Perception is nine-tenths of reality. No matter what a leader tries to communicate and how hard they work behind the scenes, what the team believes to be real is what becomes real—even if it isn't the truth.

For instance, if you're up every night working to help the team but are too tired the next day to do anything, the staff will eventually think you're tired and lazy. Explaining what you're doing behind the scenes and overexposing hard work is a way you can control that image. It's not bragging. It's setting the record straight and letting them know you're working hard for them.

#5: Be Proactive, Not Reactive

No one wants things to go wrong. However, do you put in enough planning to make sure things don't go wrong? Planning takes a lot of effort. You have to be proactive, assuming that if something can go wrong, it will. Murphy's Law, right?

For example, if you don't fill out the schedule completely one evening, no one will take that unwanted shift that was left open, and you'll be short-staffed when that shift comes around. Your system has to have a plan for what to do when that happens.

Because it will. Be prepared for anything.

#6: Lead by Example

The most important rule for any leader is to lead by example. But what kind of example is that?

It's simple. Be truthful, honest, and strong. People hate hypocrisy. For any task that you assign, the team needs to know that you'd be willing to do it yourself. And yes, sometimes it won't hurt to roll up your sleeves and help out so that they know you're in the trenches with them.

Good leaders are dependable, own their mistakes, and create solutions to fix those mistakes. Bad leaders don't do what they say, create excuses, and blame others. Be a good leader.

Overcommunication + Hard Work = Success

You're a leader, and you're supposed to lead. You lead by example, by overcommunicating, and by being honest and open with your employees. Such an attitude is infectious, and soon your team will buy into your philosophy and processes. It's a methodology that I've used for fifteen years at Andolini's, and it's been proven to work time and time again.

This is what it takes to be a boss, and your business needs a team that will work well together and see you as their manager, their mentor, and their leader. They'll respect you and work to help you succeed.

For more advice on leadership, you can find [Unsliced](#) on Amazon.

Mike Bausch is an industry leader whose restaurant, Andolini's Pizzeria, is a top ten pizzeria in the US, as named by TripAdvisor, BuzzFeed, CNN, and USA Today. Andolini's began in 2005 and has grown to five pizzerias, two gelaterias, two food hall concepts, a food truck, and a fine

dining restaurant by 2019. Mike is a World Pizza Champion, a Guinness Book world record holder, and a writer for Pizza Today. Mike is part of a Marine Corps family who has lived across America from New York to California. Mike calls Tulsa home and lives with his wife, Michelle, and son, Henry.