



slice of
LIFE

One New Mexico Employer Serves Satisfaction to Customers and Employees

By Todd Nordstrom

In life, there are certain places that have an uncanny ability to capture a place in our subconscious—triggering fond memories of moments when our senses experience almost perfect harmony between sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. In New Mexico, for many, Dion's Pizza is one of those places. The memorable aroma inspires a hunger and anticipation that is, at least while you wait for your fresh baked pizza, seemingly incurable. The atmosphere is rich with comfort—a place where families and friends gather to experience

simple qualities. And, although you might have your own fond memories of Dion's Pizza as a customer, thousands of people share a different type of nostalgia regarding the famous New Mexico restaurant—Dion's Pizza offered them an unforgettable and impactful employment experience.

"We have people come in all the time and tell us they remember working here ten or twenty years ago," says Blair Boyer, Director of Human Resources at Dion's Pizza. "And, I guess it's kind of like walking back into your old high-school—you can watch people

taking a moment to reflect as they gaze across the restaurant. Those are the instances that make us proud—knowing that we've created a positive life-learning experience for our employees. That's what it's all about."

Obviously the reputation of being a great place to work has transcended generations and seeped into the community. Go Jobing was curious to find out how Dion's Pizza has been able to consistently live up to its employment for thirty years—giving thousands of people their first taste of passion in the workplace. We met with Boyer to

get an insight into the people side of the pizza business, and we were joined by Christie Martinez, the Marketing Director at Dion's, who was quick to note, "Our people are a cornerstone of our brand."

With consistent growth, a stellar reputation for exceptionally consistent customer service, mouthwatering menu items, over 900 current employees amongst 13 New Mexico locations (expanding to West Texas in the Summer of 2008), and a track record for being an employer of choice for more than a quarter century, the people at Dion's Pizza must be doing something right. But, what is it?

"It boils down to consistency," says Martinez. "We're consistent about the quality of our food, the uncompromised service, the atmosphere, and the selection of our people—we only maintain the best in all categories."

Okay, maintaining high standards of menu items seems self-explanatory—make the best pizza, salads, and subs and stick with the recipe. But, how does a company who hires many employees for their first employment experience maintain such a fantastic quota—and how do they train and retain these people to uphold the renowned level of customer service?

"First, we understand that, at least for most employees, Dion's Pizza is a stepping stone in their work experience," says Boyer. "But, we'd actually prefer to be a launching pad. So, we actively seek people who are active outside of work—young adults or teens who are pursuing other dreams, who are involved in other extracurricular activities, and are

passionate about personal growth. Of course, that doesn't mean there aren't tremendous growth opportunities within the company. But, we don't expect most of our employees to stay with us forever. However, we do expect that we offer them an invaluable learning experience—that lasts forever."

These are refreshing words considering that many organizations who employ a majority of part-time workers consider them a number within the organization.

In today's employment market, can Dion's Pizza afford to be so selective about whom they hire?

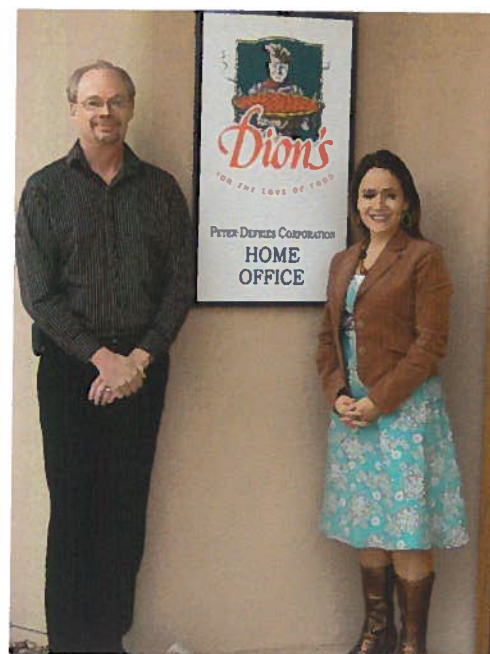
"We can't afford not to be so selective," says Boyer. "Our people are the primary touch-point to our customers. Last year we interviewed over 3600 applicants and selected only 1/4 of them. We hire people with great attitudes—service driven people, who want to learn, grow, make money, and have fun in the process. As an employer, we know we need to offer more than a paycheck to our people. Our culture needs to be fun. It needs to be rewarding. And, our people need to be recognized for their performance. We look to hire tomorrow's leaders today. If we want those people, it's critical that we are an employer of choice—because the best people can go work anywhere at this stage of their life."

"Half our employees come to us from referral," adds Martinez. "That's huge when you think about it. Our employees communicate our brand to our customers—often that's a perceived expectation of employment. But, telling your friends and family members that it's a really fun, and rewarding place

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to work isn't an expectation. So, if our people are saying good things about the company when it's not expected, imagine how well they communicate the brand with our customers when it is expected."

What does the typical employee of Dion's Pizza look like?

"We hire for attitude," says Boyer. "I look for positive energy and confidence—someone who can look me in the eye, hold a personable conversation, and has goals for the future. I want people who will tell me all the things they'll achieve in the next five years. And, I also ask all interviewees to tell me their definition of world-class customer service. I don't expect a detailed response to that question. I simply want to see if they realize that it's possible."

What is it about Dion's Pizza that has created such a fond memory for people as an employer?

"We offer competitive wages, opportunities for consistent raises, awards, recognitions, and a great environment," says Boyer. "But a lot of companies can offer those things. I think people hold fond memories of working here because

they saw what it means to be proud of their work. I think they are fond of their experience here because they were able to see what it means to perform and get recognized for it. I believe we offer people a good understanding of what a commitment to quality means, and what a dedication to world-class service means. I think we offer a fun environment."

Boyer paused. "Beyond all of that stuff, I think there's one reason that stands out," he said. "As an employer, we make it a priority to care about and inquire about the things that are most important to them—flexible schedules to pursue their dreams, a fun and social atmosphere where they build relationships, and an opportunity to view work as a positive and empowering aspect of life."

There it is—a slice of pizza and a slice of life can collide to create the perfect menu for customers and job seekers. And, seemingly, both Boyer and Martinez would recommend the same thing for life and pizza—there are a lot of great options, but you can't go wrong with 'Build Your Own.' ♦

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