



Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business

Danny Meyer

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The bestselling business book from award-winning restauranteur Danny Meyer, of Union Square Cafe, Gramercy Tavern, and Shake Shack

Seventy-five percent of all new restaurant ventures fail, and of those that do stick around, only a few become icons. Danny Meyer started Union Square Cafe when he was 27, with a good idea and hopeful investors. He is now the co-owner of a restaurant empire. How did he do it? How did he beat the odds in one of the toughest trades around? In this landmark book, Danny shares the lessons he learned developing the dynamic philosophy he calls Enlightened Hospitality. The tenets of that philosophy, which emphasize strong in-house relationships as well as customer satisfaction, are applicable to anyone who works in any business. Whether you are a manager, an executive, or a waiter, Danny's story and philosophy will help you become more effective and productive, while deepening your understanding and appreciation of a job well done.

Setting the Table is a landmark motivational work from one of our era's most gifted and insightful business leaders.

Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business Details

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Ev says

The state of mind at which I finish this book is awash in two dichotomous realities: utter relief, in what has been a persistent journey to finish something so tepid and platitudinous in delivery; and a misplaced sense of pompous accomplishment in doing so. Thus defines the broad crux of my review.

My main aim was to glean some unique insight into management and professional success. I think the restaurant place is an astute metaphor for all business; stress, pressure and human relationships define them. Meyer also published this book years ago, at which time some of his insights would have been less mainstream or common-sensical, with the right amount of experience. But overall, I felt his book was filled with a variety of very political "glittering generalizations" - statements that everyone can agree with, and make him look good.

His attempts to make the book more colorful or personal made the first half of the book almost comical. It was not altogether sensual; he seemed to list off his gastronomical experiences, or lay out personal stories in almost a rosy-colored, Hollywood-fairytale kind of way, rather than emphasize the grit and the grime. Maybe I want to have my cake and eat it too, but I felt he overcompensated for this watered-down, neatly packaged storytelling by extending the personal narrative pages beyond what it should have lasted.

I did not feel that Meyer assessed much of substance until the second half of the book, or more specifically page 139, when he actually put a number in print: "The 51 Percent Solution". That's when he began to apply his vast experience to something useful and formulaic, to be passed on to the eager reading audience.

Overall, this book was a useful reminder, not a novel discovery. It made me hungry for French quiche and schnapps, even if I were imagining Meyer's incredibly white teeth across the table from me.

Hardik Seth says

I took this book up to read something about the restaurant business. A good insight into the industry, specific to the US or rather NYC or more specifically Manhattan; with some business gyaan here and there. I am wondering if there's a similar story/book for the Indian context.

One should read this book and make a list of restaurants to visit and the dishes to try on their next visit to NYC, the gastronomic capital of the world. In one of the earlier chapters, the author also accounts his visit to countless hidden restaurants and brasseries in Europe in the 1980s; which I might try someday.

A good read for someone who is intrigued by the restaurant business (this is a 20,000 ft view) and the power of hospitality (more anecdotal).

Tyler says

A friend of mine turned me on to this wonderful business book by James Beard award-winning Restaurateur Danny Meyer (of Union Square Cafe, Blue Smoke, Gramercy Tavern, Eleven Madison Park, Tabla, Shake Shack, The Modern, and Hudson Yards Catering fame).

My friend had mentioned to me that this was a book that his boss (an accomplished businessman and investor who I greatly admire) couldn't stop talking about. It wasn't far into this book that I too could see the reason behind the enthusiasm of my friend's boss. This is not a book for only foodies, restaurant owners, and food writers. It is a book for all people that are serious about business, leadership, and management.

Danny Meyer is a lucid thinker, whose business philosophies (of "enlightened hospitality") are proven, distilled, powerful, and timeless.

Frankly, reading this book has heightened my antenna to businesses that get customer service right, and unfortunately to the large majority that get it painfully wrong.

Whether it is teaching his people to be agents not gatekeepers, developing a new restaurant's real estate assets based on the concept of "context, context, context" instead of "location, location, location," making customers feel like they have a shared ownership, by hiring "51 percenters", collecting and connecting dots, expanding his business empire in a concerted way that doesn't overextend the business's resources- Danny Meyer demonstrates his prowess as not only a Restaurateur, but also an entrepreneur, writer, leader, manager, and visionary.

The Kindle addition of this book does suffer from sloppy editing, which is ironic given the meticulous nature of Meyer when it comes to his restaurant empire. For example, the temperature feels like "twenty five degress", service is "ser vice"; Meyer was "champing" not chomping at the bit, etc. These editorial oversights have the taste of a lamb chop cooked dry and served cold in an otherwise brilliant restaurant.

Despite these minor editorial shortcomings, Meyer in "Setting the Table" has written a lasting business book for not just food people. This is an important and well-written book that outlines an enlightened, customer-centric, at times counter-intuitive, but consistently effective approach to not only business, but also life.

Jo says

I am a huge fan of Danny Meyer and I like most of the book, but then began to get very bored very quickly. I am not sure I even finished it. It does give you good insight into his hospitality philosophy which I admire.

Mikedariano says

Unexpected to enjoy this as much as I did. Just the part on how to work with customers (the 5 A's) made the book worthwhile. Overall a great per-page book and as a non-New Yorker I probably underappreciate Meyer's work.

Ernst-Jan Pfauth says

Danny Meyer is een van de beroemdste restaurateurs in de Verenigde Staten. In Nederland kent vrijwel niemand hem, maar ik vond twee aanknopingspunten. De beursgang van zijn hamburgerketen Shake Shack en zijn queeste om fooien af te schaffen haalden onlangs allebei de Nederlandse kranten. Die zaken speelden nog niet toen Meyer dit boek schreef, het komt uit 2006. Shake Shack had één vestiging. Meyer beschrijft hoe hij zijn eerste restaurants – Union Square Cafe en Gramercy Tavern – begon, en de restaurantromantiek spat er van af. Maar de reden dat ik dit boek aanbeveel, is om Meyers speerpunt: gastvrijheid. In elk restaurant moet het voelen alsof je bij vrienden eet. Hij gebruikt zowel minutieuze managementstrategieën als technologie om dat voor elkaar te krijgen. Dit is waardevol om te lezen voor iedereen die met klanten of een publiek omgaat, of als ondernemer wil leren hoe je hoge standaarden in een snelgroeidend bedrijf handhaaft (en hoger blijft leggen).

Lees hier de notities die ik bij Setting the Table maakte: <https://pfauth.com/zelfverbetering/da...>

Alan says

Corporate glossy version of the restaurant trade

This is pretty light on any of the blood and guts behind the scenes of the restaurant business but does have its points in terms of the psychology of customer interaction and the selection of employees for your business. Meyer's 51 percent rule of hiring people who bring a greater share of emotional skills vs a lower share of technical skills (which can in most cases be taught and learned) is something of wider use beyond the food business.

For a grittier, albeit fictionalized, view of the Union Square Café group see Stephanie Danler's Sweetbitter.

Fud says

Although I got tired and a bit bored by the finish I gained a respect and admiration for the expertise and dedication of Danny Meyer. It bodes well for the success of Shake Shack.

Normalene says

Danny Meyer's New York restaurants survived through 9/11, the downturn of 2008 and not only survived but thrived. How he does it is something every person who deals with customer service should read. He talks about training, hiring the best fit, not necessarily the best qualified, how to maintain your vision when the whole world is telling you you're wrong and what is important to him in maintaining the high quality he is known for. It takes a while to get into the meat of the book, but once you do you'll want your own copy so you can make margin notes and put sticky notes everywhere you find a gem.

He calls what he does “enlightened hospitality” but it is actually awesome customer-focused quality service which he implements in a way that might not be what you think would work, but it does. Even the blurb at

the front gives a few hints about the wisdom you'll find inside: "Hospitality is when something happens for you. It is absent when something happens to you. These two concepts – for and to – express it all." "Shared ownership develops when guests talk about a restaurant as if it's theirs. That sense of affiliation builds trust and invariably leads to repeat business." "Err on the side of generosity: You get more by first giving more." "Wherever your center lies, know it, name it, believe in it. When you cede your core values to someone else, it's time to quit."

One of my favorite quotes from inside the book is: "Service is the technical delivery of a product. Hospitality is how the delivery of that product makes its recipient feel. Service is a monologue – we decide how we want to do things and set our own standards of service. Hospitality, on the other hand, is a dialogue... It takes both great service and great hospitality to rise to the top."

I loved this book. For all human resource managers and customer service representatives this should be a must read for you.

Ashley says

Captivated Server

This book has been an inspiration! I chose to rejoin the restaurant industry as I finished college because it was what I knew and was comfortable with. After giving the corporate world a chance, I took my business degree back to where my passion was. It was more than encouraging to hear praise for those who have love for hospitality! Working in a restaurant isn't what it used to be and I don't have! that hanging over my head any longer.

A great read for anyone interested in hospitality!

Matthew Bunk says

His appeal for differentiation between service and hospitality should be embraced by anyone in a service industry.

Reading this made me want to buy a ticket to NYC and eat at all of his restaurants immediately.

The insights in the second half of the book about running his current empire made a greater lasting impression than the beginning which mostly focused on the history of how he built it.

Josh says

not poorly written at all, and in fact pretty engaging. i just cant stand danny meyer. basically, if you have a

cool 500k of daddy's \$\$\$ and know some shady real estate agents in nyc, you can own a restaurant too!!!

James Wright says

"In the end, what's most meaningful is creating positive, uplifting outcomes for human experiences and human relationships. Business, like life, is all about how you make people feel. It's that simple, and it's that hard."

There is no question that Mr. Meyer is on to something. Although some of his more high-end concepts have collapsed under the heft of their lofty aspirations, Meyer has grown his single restaurant into a multi-million dollar empire. At the center of it all is the notion that how you make people feel is more important than anything else, even the food. Sure the food has to be good, but exceptional service can erase even a major menu-malfunction.

It is difficult to be truly impartial here because I believed Meyer's success to be closely tied to his obsession with hospitality from the first time I was introduced to his philosophy. Everything he said seemed so simple, so obvious and yet we see that, like many such things, it is far more difficult to actually do it.

Meyer shares many extraordinary anecdotes that demonstrate how his approach has contributed to success which provide a pleasant narrative backdrop to the practical details. Actually, there is really only 1 principal: hire the right people. And it's corollary, hiring the right people is really hard. He lays out some helpful guidelines for identifying who NOT to hire but the key becomes creating a place people want to work so that you can attract and keep the best talent.

It is the kind of book that I plan to re-read often in order to digest the multitude of bite-sized insights sprinkled throughout. A must read for any aspiring restaurateur.

Laura Vana says

One of the best business books I've read so far. Danny Meyer, a great restaurateur with a huge legacy of high-class restaurants shares his business and leadership mindset from a hospitality point of view. I think the same mindset applies to any kind of business. I'd recommend it to anyone who is interested in becoming a better leader and building great teams, not only to the ones in the hospitality industry.

Mindy says

I don't think I will ever find a business book that is as great as "Good to Great" but this book is definitely up there in my top two or three. This is an easy to read, and if you love food, gripping book about how to open, develop, grow, evolve, design, run and have fun in a restaurant. Bu it goes way beyond restaurants.

In his introduction Danny says, "In the end, what's most meaningful is creating positive, uplifting outcomes for human experiences and human relationships. Business, like life, is all about how you make people feel.

It's that simple and it's that hard." The rest of the book is all about how he does/did that. There are many lessons in this book that are 100% applicable to libraries.

It is full of gems, those things that you know that you know but you can't quite nail them down. You can tell that he has spent a lot of time (years) thinking about his philosophies and methods and because of this he has been able to put them into the book in an understandable and interesting way. By the end of this book I not only wanted to (and will) eat at every one of his restaurants, but you want to be his friend. Here is a man who loves life, people, and food. His heart is in the right place and his actions speak as loud, if not louder than his words.

Shira and I actually ate at his first restaurant, The Union Square Café, a few years ago on a visit to New York. Shira still talks about the melt in your mouth Ahi Tuna and Wasabi mashed potatoes. I still remember being amazed that we walked in without a reservation and were seated at a wonderful table. It has remained one of our favorite experiences in New York and now I know why!
