



Unreasonable Hospitality

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Will Guidara is the founder of Thank You, a hospitality company that develops world-class destinations and helps leaders across industries transform their approach to customer service. He is a former co-owner of Eleven Madison Park and the NoMad. He has co-authored four cookbooks and was named one of Crain's New York Business's 40 Under 40.

The Nutshell

Despite our accolades, at the 2010 World's 50 Best Restaurants awards, Eleven Madison Park (EMP) came in fiftieth—dead last. Determined to improve, my partner Daniel and I set a bold goal: to become the number one restaurant in the world. We introduced “Unreasonable Hospitality,” applying the same unreasonable approach we had toward excellence in our food to how we made people feel. We removed anything transactional, greeting guests by name, turning ordering into a dialogue, and personalizing the experience.

Early in my career, I learned about the impact of small gestures and the power of intentionality. Working with

Danny Meyer, I embraced his philosophy of Enlightened Hospitality: hire great people, treat them well, and they will take great care of customers. At EMP, Daniel and I aimed to create a restaurant run equally by the kitchen and the dining room, fostering collaboration.

We realized the importance of setting expectations and building a team culture where it was cool to care. We encouraged our team to fully engage, hiring individuals with a genuine passion for hospitality.

One afternoon, overhearing guests mention they hadn't tried a New York street hot dog, I bought one, and Dan-

iel plated it elegantly. The guests were thrilled, calling it the highlight of their trip. This sparked the realization that we could create magical, personalized moments. We created the “Dreamweaver” role to craft unique experiences and built a “tool kit” for recurring situations, empowering our team to create magic regularly.

Hospitality isn’t exclusive to restaurants; every business can find opportunities for improvisational hospitality. It’s about transforming transactions into relationships through genuine care.

We faced challenges, like when The New York Times food critic Pete Wells published a scathing review of our New York-themed menu. I realized I’d made mistakes: going too far and making my captains into performers,

removing genuine conversation. We returned to trusting the team and simplified our mission: “To be the most delicious and gracious restaurant in the world.”

In 2017, after years of hard work and dedication to hospitality, Eleven Madison Park was named the best restaurant in the world. We’d won because of our collective focus on Unreasonable Hospitality.

This journey taught me that when you work in hospitality—and I believe that whatever you do, you can choose to be in the hospitality business—you have the privilege of making people’s lives better by creating a magical world they can escape to. It’s time for all of us to start being unreasonable about hospitality.