

A motivated and satisfied “crew” makes Raising Cane’s unstoppable

Raising Cane’s, the wildly popular fast casual restaurant brand known for its ONE LOVE® quality chicken finger meals, built its vibrant culture on service. After all, the restaurant’s legions of dedicated fans are known as Caniacs – and there are millions of them.

So, what makes this high-powered service culture work so well throughout the chain’s 500 locations? The answer: a highly motivated team of front-line employees who are remarkably satisfied and dedicated to the company’s mission.

How is this possible in an industry not always known for friendly service? Part of Raising Cane’s vision is a winning combination that includes a great crew, a cool culture and active community engagement.

“We deliver the highest quality chicken finger meals as fast as we can in a friendly, clean restaurant, and we seriously have fun while we’re doing it,” explains Todd Roby, Raising Cane’s Senior Director of Communications. “Our frontline employees – known as the 1LV CREW – are essential in this equation because they serve our customers directly with responsibility for every meal we serve. If they’re working hard and having fun at the same time, we know we’re doing it right.”

You get a sense of the culture from Todd Graves, whose title – Founder, CEO, Fry Cook and Cashier – kind of says it all. “We don’t want to be another restaurant chain in the area,” he says. “We want to be an integral part of the community.”

1LV – a strong employee connection

Perhaps the most innovative way the company supports this spirited and giving employee culture is through an app platform called **1LV**, developed in partnership with Dynamic Signal. Likened to “a family reunion,” the platform is the place where employees connect with each other, submitting their thoughts and ideas about work, valuing each other, posting jokes, and staying safe.

Launched in October 2020, the 1LV program encourages employees to share memes and photos in one section called Raising Memes, and share useful job tips and techniques in another section called Crew Cuts. To support these connections, Raising Cane’s chief operating officer, AJ Kumaran, speaks directly to team members and highlights their contributions. The platform also posts information on in-store training, education opportunities and news alerts.

In this safe and creative environment, employees share everything from time-saving and quality-improving work ideas to designs for a new generation of in-store work T-shirts. Fun is an integral part of the platform where employees can post silly memes or photos or even attend a virtual training graduation ceremony, which recently included entertainer SnoopDog and former NFL star Shaquille O’Neal.

With this broad and engaging scope, 1LV has become a hit. 99% of employees surveyed have adopted the mobile app and 97% have logged in. And more than 1,000 members submit posts each month.

Community service when it counts the most

With this unique opportunity for bonding and sharing ideas, Raising Cane's community activism was relatively easy to accelerate during the darkest days of the COVID pandemic. The chain donated thousands of chicken finger meals to local healthcare workers, raised money through its Virtual Entertainment Series, and even organized Crew members to sew three-ply cloth masks.

The company also launched a fundraiser, selling branded neck-gaiters nationwide, with 100% of the net proceeds going to local hospitals in the chain's service areas – more than 80 healthcare organizations across the country. Generously buying up the neck-gaiters quickly, "Caniacs" helped raise over \$360,000. In total, the company has given back almost half a million dollars to the healthcare community, to say thank you.

Meanwhile, not a single Crew member, from a total of 23,000 Raising Cane's workers, was laid off or furloughed at a time when millions of restaurant jobs were lost across the country.

"Our mantra then was no Crew member left behind," Graves said at the time. "I wanted the team that went into this pandemic to be the team we come out with. And so we're going to work like heck to get through it." With sales down, the restaurants let customers know through the media that they were still able to serve food with enhanced safety measures and a switch to drive-thru service. Soon customers began to return, eventually bringing sales to pre-COVID-19 levels.

Deserved recognition

As it turns out, the consumer world is noticing, too. Not only has Raising Cane's earned a SCORE Award for being an Outstanding Socially Progressive Business, it was also the top-rated fast-casual restaurant for safety precautions and protocols in Technomic's survey of 27,000 consumers nationwide (Technomic is a *Restaurant Business* sister publication).

Going above and beyond CDC and local requirements, Raising Cane's was cited for continuous communications, daily training updates, stringent sanitation protocols (Crew members washed hands and changed gloves every 10 minutes), and work schedules that minimized exposure.

And it all goes back to the company's simple and unique business model – ONE LOVE – chicken finger meals served quickly and conveniently with a level of quality unmatched in the industry, thanks to a motivated and satisfied Crew, the most important asset a service business can have.