



## **Leadership and Chick-fil-A** by Four-time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

My first job in high school back in 1978 was working at Chick-fil-A. We had a horrible location up in a dark corner of the second floor of a small shopping mall in Houston. Back then Chick-fil-A had only 85 stores nationwide. But we were consistently in the top ten stores in sales.

Why did our store perform so well? It was all because of our Manager's leadership. Our manager, Steve Mason was the gung ho, motivator type that made working at a fast food restaurant a blast. Steve set high standards. He was always focused on making work fun and on getting us to constantly produce at a high level. There was always some kind of a contest going on.

One time he divided the crew into two teams and for a month ran an up-selling contest... you know, "Would you like fries with that, Sir?" Then he took the winning team to a five star restaurant for a five-course brunch. After the contest, we'd become so used to up-selling our customers, that we kept on doing it.

Steve constantly tied the store's goals to our personal goals, so we understood that we were employed by Chick-fil-A but we were really working for ourselves. He helped us understand that the work ethic and the life skills we were learning would make us more successful in the future. Out of our crew came an Air Force officer, a college professor, an automotive service manager, and an author and Olympian.

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Steve set high standards which attracted high achievers. Our crew stuck together and became tight. We worked for Steve for three years and we still keep in touch 40 years later! Unheard of in the fast food industry.

It didn't take long for the Chick-fil-A corporation to figure out that Steve was too valuable to just be running a store. Steve got promoted to VP of Operations Services for Chick-fil-A.

Unfortunately, the manager that replaced Steve was not the leader Steve was, and within 6 months we all quit. The restaurant ended up shutting down a few years after that.

Steve taught me a lot about leadership. He showed me that no matter what your circumstances are, (in our case bad restaurant location), a leader can single-handedly create a winning environment, a winning culture wherever they are. Leadership flows from the top down. Not the other way around.

Start becoming the best leader you can be... at home, at work, at the little league field, and in your community. Become a better leader and you'll attract top people to your team. And as you do, you'll be changing the world around you.

**Put it into action:**

Associate with winners and top performers. Become the best leader you can be so you can attract and keep the best talent.



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