

What My 75-Year-Old Bagel Shop Can Teach You About Building Trust and Community



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Key Takeaways

- Consistent actions, not words, build authentic trust with customers over time.
- Teams learn company values through observed habits, not manuals or memos.
- A clear purpose guides decisions, strengthens resilience and sustains community focus.

Seventy-five years in business is no small feat, and our family owns that with pride. Since 1947, we have kept the ovens warm through the 1970s inflation, the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the 2008–09 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Not every food vendor made it through those turns.

The pandemic was a different battle. As a federally recognized essential business, we stayed open, but customers couldn't stay inside the stores for long. They had to grab their orders and go. It was a tough shift, but we didn't give up. We adjusted quickly to online ordering, delivery and everything. The real challenge was proving we could still be there for our community while maintaining six feet of distance, of course.

Each shakeup changed how we work, what we sell and how people buy. A lot has changed except for one thing – *our sense of community*. We still greet people by name, box the extra bagels at close and send them to local groups that need them. The same neighborhoods that kept us going get the same care from us each day. That anchor carried us through every test and still guides how we operate.

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1. Trust is built by what you repeat

We talk a lot about values in business. Companies print them on posters and put them in brand manuals. I have learned that customers do not need to hear your values. They only need to see them in action, consistently. Trust is not built in a day and definitely not with a flashy gesture or a year-end charity check. It is constructed behind the scenes, with a thousand small promises kept. That repetition creates reliability, and dependability builds trust. People can tell when you are there for them, whether in good times or bad. They may not be aware

of the details of your operations, but consumers sense authenticity when a business upholds its principles.

This authenticity isn't about having the flashiest new product. It's about the customer knowing, instinctively, that the quality will be the exact same on a slow Tuesday as during a holiday rush. It is embodied in the manager who remembers a regular's name or the simple promise to make an order right if it ever goes wrong. These are the tangible moments where the 'thousand small promises' become a customer's reality.

That kind of authenticity is the most valuable asset a brand can hold, and it is the one thing competitors cannot copy. They cannot fake a 75-year-old habit. It tells your customers, "We are who we say we are." That is the kind of trust you can only earn.

2. Your team learns what matters by watching you

Culture shows up in the work people see us do. Manuals help, but habits do the teaching. Teams remember what you protect and what you refuse to cut.

At closing, new hires see the standard. We box up any extra bagels at the end of the day, set the paperwork and confirm pickup. It is not an *if-we-have-time* task. It is part of our daily closing.

This non-negotiable act does more than help move excess food. It demonstrates that our connection to the neighborhood is, quite literally, one of the last things we do before we lock the door.

We keep the process simple. Local schools, churches and nonprofits send a letter requesting donations, and we log who receives the food. It's just how "our" system works, and everyone in the team knows it by heart.

That routine roots our business in the local culture. Most of our stores have partners to whom we donate on a daily or weekly basis. We support many groups, from the Salvation Army to the volunteers who build *Rose Parade floats in Pasadena*. For a full month, we make sure those volunteers have bagels while they work. Every year, they give us a plaque to remind us of that connection. It reminds our staff that we are not simply a company in the area, but a valued member of the community.

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3. Purpose helps you stay steady when it counts

Every company that survives for decades will have difficult periods, and that's just how it is. In those moments, a clear purpose helps you stay steady. This is where a daily habit pays off. Because we have done it every day, it doesn't feel "extra" for us.

For other companies, the temptation is to immediately look at the bottom line and identify these donations as a 'cost' that can be cut. It is often the easiest line item to slash. A purpose-driven mindset changes this perspective. From being a cost, it becomes an investment in the ecosystem that supports your business and your staff. And because community is central to our work, even hard weeks don't make us turn inward. They sharpen our focus and push us to show up stronger for our customers and the neighborhoods we serve.

That shifts the conversation to not only "Where can we cut costs?" but also to "What protects service, quality, and the people who count on us?"

Whatever the answer is, it always sets the order of work. It

keeps the team focused, and it builds real resilience. As an entrepreneur, when you know *why* you show up each day, growth always feels steady and purposeful, whatever it may look like.

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