

ATLAS RESTAURANT GROUP'S RECIPE FOR LEADERSHIP

ONE-DAY WORKSHOPS PARTICIPANTS

Many Baltimoreans are familiar with the storied legacy of the Paterakis family. They're the bread-making dynasty that founded H&S Bakery—a sprawling collection of properties in Baltimore's Harbor East that churns out millions of dollars' worth of baked goods each year for titans like McDonalds and nearly all of Maryland's public schools. The hardworking ethos of its founder, John Paterakis, is baked into the company culture.

It should come as no surprise that this ethos has found its way into the recipe for Atlas Restaurant Group, founded by Paterakis' grandsons, Alex and Eric Smith. What began as a single delicatessen in Harbor East that opened in 2010 has grown into a remarkable company that boasts 50 properties across five states and employs 3,000 team members.

It should also come as no surprise that Atlas' remarkable growth requires strategic planning and exceptional leadership at all levels of the company. Enter the Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute at Towson University.

"We knew we wanted to invest in our employees and give them access to opportunities to grow. There are a lot of synergies between the Institute and Atlas. Our values are aligned in the sense that both organizations are local and want to build a stronger local economy. Atlas' Employee Core Values are professionalism, responsibility, excellence, trust, training, teamwork, uniqueness, and community. Since training is a vital part of our values, it was a key reason why we chose the Institute's leadership development program. This partnership was really a perfect fit and came at an ideal time," says Erin Black, Vice President, Marketing and Design at Atlas.

The partnership between Atlas and the Grasmick Institute includes one-day workshops for leaders that come from a variety of departments and properties at Atlas. The workshop is followed by a year's worth of weekly or bi-weekly interdepartmental meetings of each leadership cohort. Team members have been extremely enthusiastic about the results—even staffers who initially were skeptical about participation.

"There were a lot of 'Ah-ha moments,'" recalls Black. "I can recall a few people who were a little reluctant in the beginning, questioning why they had to be there. But the Institute's methods are so effective because it's not just being talked at—it's very interactive. I firmly believe that you learn by doing, and the trainings offer a really good combination of learning, then putting it into practice in a small group setting. At the end of the workshop, I remember one reluctant staff member raising his hand to say he was so appreciative of the day and excited to apply what he learned to better manage his team."

Another component that the Atlas team appreciated was the specificity of the program, as the Grasmick Institute customized the training to address the unique leadership needs of the hospitality industry.

"Hospitality is a difficult industry and often it's hard to retain good talent," says Black. "The Institute weaved our core values into the training program which made it very specific to us and our staff, so they can apply it again in real life."

According to Atlas founder Alex Smith, Baltimoreans who enjoy a great meal at one of Atlas' many popular restaurants will appreciate the difference.

"Ultimately, when I founded this company, my goal was to contribute positively to the city of Baltimore that my family and I have loved for generations," says Smith. "The Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute has helped me do this by giving my staff what they need to thrive so that each property presents its best to the people we serve."