

GORDON RAMSAY... THE PERFECTIONIST

Focussing on what he does best – delivering culinary perfection – has earned Gordon Ramsay a fearsome reputation and a hugely successful business. Lisa Hitchin spoke to him while filming the BT ad campaign to find out more

What do you love most about running your own business?
‘It’s about a sense of freedom that requires focus and discipline. Running your own business is scary, and that’s where the adrenaline comes from. You are the boss and you have to maintain standards. It’s an amazing challenge, not once a week or once a month but each and every day.’

What makes a successful business?
‘We never take the customer for granted. We’ve never sent out a dish and said, “They won’t notice the difference.” I’d rather keep the customer waiting 15 minutes and get it perfect. And a successful chef puts himself in the customer’s position. You can’t have a menu laced with offal or foie gras – not everyone who comes into your restaurant is going to be a foodie. Today, the phenomenal choice of restaurants means competition is intense. For me, pressure’s healthy. It only becomes unhealthy when you can’t handle it... and then you shouldn’t be there.’

Has your growth been gradual and is that key?
‘It’s taken a decade. However, for me the secret is to make sure the business runs to perfection, with or without me. That’s a challenge. You need to master it, and make sure there are no discrepancies... but it’s a tough card to play.’

Do you still get scared?
‘I get scared every day, twice a day – before lunch and before dinner. Customers vote with their feet, they just don’t come back. That’s why I’m not interested in a complimentary letter: I want to see a complaint letter. You have to

stay six months ahead of your customers. They come back for that magic, that excitement, that perfection, and that’s not easy to achieve. It’s a fight to get there.’

What’s the most common problem businesses come up against when expanding?
‘Businesses can trip up if they fail to consolidate. It gives a positive foundation to any business. When you start spreading yourself too thinly, you can fail to meet the same standards second or third time round. We’ve worked hard at this and now have 12 restaurants across the world.’

What have you learned from your mistakes?
‘That I’m only as good as my team. And that, in terms of creativity, you cannot afford to get carried away. If I come up with a dish that I’m really excited about, the question has to be, “Can we do that 20 times over?” Every time a new restaurant opens – be it good or bad – my staff are there within 24 hours. There’s just as much to be learned from a bad experience as from a good one. We come back and talk about it, and look at the negatives.’

How do you manage to keep customers coming back again and again?
‘The first way is to be consistent. You can’t be good on Thursday, and then not bad on Friday. When, like us, you have 10/10 in The Which? Good Food Guide and three Michelin stars, there is nowhere to go other than to maintain that standard. Secondly, you can’t afford to become static. You have to keep moving on all the time.’

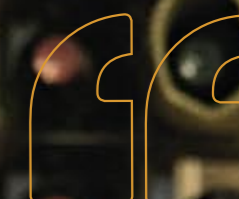
For the full, filmed interview with Gordon Ramsay visit bt.com/business

RAMSAY ON...

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS
‘Discipline yourself; be hard on yourself. I’ve never had dinner in my own restaurant. Don’t indulge yourself in your business – treat it as a business. In terms of starting out, you have to push yourself to the extreme, both mentally and physically.’

BUILDING A TEAM
‘Your staff will only do what they see you do. So, whether I’m scaling a salmon or sticking my fingers in a pigeon’s backside, if I do it, they’ll do it. Building a team is part of the foundation of a good business. No-one calls me Chef; it’s Gordon. That’s how you get the best out of your team.’

MOTIVATION
‘I’ve always been a great motivator. We don’t think of what we’ve got and how good we are. It’s about achievement every day – we have to start from scratch every single day.’



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Gordon Ramsay, entrepreneur and chef



PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT HIND