

# Up Close & Personal

**Rob Rush** | CEO  
LRA WORLDWIDE

Rob Rush isn't a chef—but he could be. At least you get the impression he could whip up a tasty entrée or two, given the metaphors he uses to describe what he believes to be the cornerstone of service excellence.

"I just recognized there were a number of ingredients that, when stirred, create a great recipe," says Rush, explaining the attention-grabbing title of a presentation he recently shared with attendees of the NGCOA's Multi-Course Owners Retreat: "The Secret Sauce of Customer Experience Management."

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Catchy titles aside, Rush bases his principles on real-world observations and strategies he's used to help such companies as Aramark, Westin Hotels and TPC Golf Course Properties enhance their customer service offerings and strengthen their brands. He boils all of his findings down to five principles that he contends separate exemplar companies from those that are simply surviving. Of these five tenets, Rush preaches the virtues of one above all others: the quality and resourcefulness of a company's employees to interact with customers.

"It's not about price; it's about quality," notes Rush, referring to lessons the most private of clubs or the most public of courses can learn about customer service. "You could be a local muni and aspire to have guests who are still engaged with you and the product you're offering."

Of course, to have employees who are truly engaged requires leaders who are equally committed to serving others. Rush calls it "walking the talk," and if, as a business owner, you're not doing it, Rush argues that there's no reason to expect your customers to be emotionally connected to your company or product.

"If you're in the hospitality business, you can't be half-pregnant," Rush says. "You have to embrace it, enjoy it and get good at it."

Failing to do so can mean the difference between a recipe for success—or one doomed to fail. "You can always raise money and build another course," Rush adds, "but you can't rip off a culture."