

Having words with Marty Cox Founder, President and Chairman, IAG Coffee Franchise LLC

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Marty Cox walked into the same coffeehouse he'd been going to for years, ordered his usual coffee, and reached into his pocket for his wallet. Oops, no wallet. No problem, said the owner, who recognized Cox as a regular customer. Pay for it tomorrow. The next morning Cox walked into the coffeehouse, money in hand to pay for yesterday's coffee. The place was packed with customers. Suddenly the owner hollered out to Cox, wanting to know whether he ever paid for that coffee.

Cox was embarrassed and wondered why he, a loyal customer, should be ridiculed in front of others. He decided that he would open his own coffeehouse and treat his customers better than he had been treated.

He and his wife, Louise Montgomery, decided they had to learn about the coffee business. They attended courses at the Specialty Coffee Association of America, read books on the subject and visited independent coffeehouses in California and Seattle.



They opened their first It's A Grind coffeehouse in 1994 and by 2000 were operating five units. Shortly afterward they formed IAG Coffee Franchise LLC so they could expand the chain and not worry about having to run every unit themselves. Today, there are more than 100 It's A Grind coffeehouses in 14 states.

How did you choose the name for your coffeehouse?

I was sharing my business plan with some of my colleagues and I had a different name selected. One of my colleagues stated something obvious: "Call it something coffeehouse-ish, like It's A Grind."

What did you learn from that embarrassing incident in the coffeehouse?

Treat people with dignity and respect and common sense. Be nice. Think of the consequences before you speak. It was just a really stupid thing to say.

How do you ensure that your employees treat people the right way?

We look for people who genuinely enjoy helping others. We've gone so far as to implement a psychological survey that every employee and franchisee takes. That identifies their core traits and values.

How is It's A Grind different from other chains?

It's our attitude. We have an "always say yes" attitude. We try to go that extra mile. We cut the bagel and put the cream cheese on it for you.

What makes a good franchisee?

A good franchisee is somebody who really gets a charge out of going out of their way to please other people, to make other people's days better. They want to get out of their store and become a part of the local community.

FAST FACTS

AGE: 41

BIRTHPLACE: Southern California

EDUCATION: high school graduate

HOBBIES: boating, traveling, caring for homeless animals and trying to find homes for them

You once said you'd like to be the No. 2 chain in terms of units. Still true?

I think we can become the No. 2 chain. We're growing at a pretty healthy rate. We'd like to grow in our existing markets. The nice thing about the coffeehouse business is you draw from a relatively small neighborhood around the store.

In what ways do you market the coffeehouses?

The best way we can market ourselves is to get outside of our store and serve coffee at local functions, meetings and community events. Shake hands with people and invite them into the store, and once you get them into the store you have to deliver on our promises.

How much coffee do you drink a day?

I have an espresso drip coffee, probably seven or eight cups a day. When I go to a franchise store I always order a dry cappuccino to test the barista's skills.