

The Leadership Style of Chef Gordon Ramsay

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### **GORDON RAMSAY**

Perhaps the most famous celebrity chef, Gordon Ramsay is as famous for his hot temper as he is for his food. On shows such as Hell's Kitchen, Master Chef, and Kitchen Nightmares we often see Ramsay yelling at the participants, berating their cooking, their preparation, their choices, and their management abilities. A casual observer of Ramsay in action could easily describe Ramsay's leadership style as an authority-compliance (9,1) leadership style. Ramsay is certainly an authority on food; he holds 12 Michelin stars at his different restaurants. Ramsay must insist on strict compliance to his recipes, food presentation, food freshness, food safety, and kitchen sanitation. A failure in any of those areas of food production could mean a loss of status and prestige, loss of customers, and loss of human life. Therefore, when we see Ramsay yelling at a chef that just cannot cook scallops correctly it would be easy for us to conclude that he is an authority compliance monster.

Looking more closely, we see that Ramsay is identifying and developing artists in the kitchen. Ramsay is a transformational leader who employs a strict adherence to proper cooking techniques, skills, etc., to transform ordinary chefs into artists. Chefs that cannot handle Ramsay's style, chef that wash out, are of little concern to Ramsay. Chefs that can run the gauntlet and master Ramsay's labyrinth receive the keys to a lifestyle that few achieve. Those conquering chefs realize the highest levels of respect in the industry.

Transformational leaders are good role models; how does Ramsay pass this test when he is yelling at and berating chefs in the kitchen? What is important to understand is that Ramsay does not yell at chefs who make mistakes; he yells at chefs who make the same mistakes repeatedly. Often in a kitchen, there is no one to supervise what a chef is doing with the food he is preparing. To be a great chef, a true artist, requires a chef of high integrity and ethics. No one

doubts Ramsay's integrity or ethics when it comes to food. Ramsay would be a hypocrite if he allowed anyone working with or for him to have ethics and standards less than he does. We can see Ramsay as a good role model if we look at his actions in that context.

Another important area that transformational leaders are expected to excel at is to give meaning, a sense of purpose, to the organization and its followers. Ramsay constantly conveys to the participants of the show that what they do, preparing food for others, is incredibly important. Ramsay constantly is relating the food that is prepared to the individuals who eat it and he wants to earn their trust so that he has the privilege to continue preparing food for them. Ill-prepared food can kill people, so meet the standard or throw it out. Badly prepared food kills the spirit, so throw that out as well. An unmotivated, lazy chef cannot inspire anyone with his cooking and Ramsay will do whatever he can to motivate the individual. If he is not successful in motivating the chef, he gets rid of him.

I do not see a big difference in the way that Ramsay's leadership style is different from that of managers in the United States. While it is not common to have managers and leaders yell at staff in the US, it happens and many people have experienced that. The difference that makes yelling by Ramsay tenable is that he does it only to break through stubbornness, laziness, or other issues that are blocking the chef from realizing that their execution is not up to par. He does not do it for personal injury to the chefs he yells at.