

Why Homosexuals Are Having a Cow Over Chick-fil-A

Editor's Note: With Christians showing their support for Chick-fil-A on Wednesday by dining at the chicken chain during Mike Huckabee's "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day," we wanted to share a story we originally ran in 2004 about Chick-fil-A President Dan Cathy. We're glad that, more than eight years later, the fast-food chain's fundamental beliefs haven't changed.

It's noon at Chick-fil-A's national headquarters in Atlanta. Lunch time.

Employees are lining up at the company's cafeteria. On today's menu, there's pasta in cream sauce, fresh salad and, of course, piping hot chicken sandwiches.

As you exit the line for hot food, there's a soft-serve "Ice Dream" machine. Take as much as you like because, after all, everything is free ... not just today, but every day of the workweek.

For Chick-fil-A's 475 corporate employees, it's a sweet deal. But that's just the topping on the sundae.

Chick-fil-A, the second-largest quick-service chicken restaurant chain in the nation, demonstrates a commitment to its employees—and its customers—that's rarely seen in today's marketplace. From modest beginnings in a tiny Georgia eatery 60 years ago, the company has grown into one of the largest privately owned restaurant chains in America with more than 1,100 restaurants nationwide.

The mainstay on the menu is the original **Chick-fil-A** Chicken Sandwich. The recipe's a tasty secret, locked up tight in a safe on the first floor of company headquarters.

But the first priority for Chick-fil-A isn't just to serve chicken. It's to **serve a higher calling**. This is spelled out in Chick-fil-A's corporate purpose: "To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A."

That's why the company invests in scholarships, character-building programs for kids, foster homes and other community services. It's also why all of its restaurants are closed on Sundays.

This gives the employees at Chick-fil-A's restaurants time to **worship**, to rest and to spend time with their families. Some observers see this as a missed business opportunity. But Chick-fil-A president Dan T. Cathy sees it differently.

"We think our food tastes better on Monday because we're closed on Sunday," Cathy says. "We've got to take care of our people in order to serve great food. And that doesn't happen if people are working seven days a week."

Home Cooking

At Chick-fil-A, hospitality starts at the top. As lunch concludes, Cathy converses easily with employees and buses their food trays. He doesn't do it for show; he just can't help himself.

Cathy, 51, has been picking up after people since he was a boy. His father is S. Truett Cathy, 83, the company's founder and the undisputed "inventor of the chicken sandwich." It was Truett who, years ago, put Dan to work picking up trash in the parking lot of Truett's first restaurant in Hapeville, Ga.

To this day, whenever Dan visits one of Chick-fil-A's locations, he scans the parking lot for garbage.

"My wife won't let me hold her hand after I've been picking up

all this stuff," he jokes in his Georgia drawl. "I wash up; I never have died yet from picking up cigarette butts."

This is what sets Dan Cathy apart from so many executives in this competitive industry. He isn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

"A lot of restaurants are not run by restaurateurs any more," Cathy notes. "It's one of the problems and struggles you see at Burger King and McDonald's and others: They're run by financial analysts; they're run by accountants that know a lot more about their financial statements than they do their recipes."

"This chain is still run by restaurateurs that spend a lot of time in the kitchen. I can go back there in the kitchen, and I can make any of our recipes. From the biscuits to the coleslaw to the carrot-and-raisin salad, I know them all."

Cathy is wide-eyed. He talks with his hands and displays childlike enthusiasm for his work. This isn't surprising, given the fact that he has been an active part of the company since he was a kid.

Cathy's nearly lifelong career at Chick-fil-A began officially at age 9, when he sang for his dad's customers wearing a "dorky, little dwarf costume," as Cathy tells it. An accomplished trumpet player (he still plays on Sundays for New Hope Baptist Church in Senoia, Georgia), Cathy kicked around the idea of becoming a professional musician back when he was a teenager.

He tabled that idea when one of his musical heroes began using drugs. Cathy explains: "I didn't want to go in that direction if it meant playing in honky-tonks, nightclubs and such as that. So, between where he was headed with his life and where Chick-fil-A was going, I made the decision to work with Dad."

Cathy went on to earn a bachelor's degree in business

administration from Georgia Southern University. He then returned to Chick-fil-A, where he served as director of operations, opening more than 50 new restaurants throughout the country.

As Chick-fil-A continued to grow, so did Cathy's business acumen. He earned his stripes, rising steadily through the ranks as senior director of operations, vice president of operations, executive vice president, and, most recently, president and chief operating officer.

Truett Cathy, Chick-fil-A's founder and chairman, notes: "Dan is a natural leader. Not many fathers can feel comfortable leaving the business to their son, but Dan is even more excited about Chick-fil-A and its future than I am."

Not that Truett has taken a back seat in the organization.

"He [Truett] is still the CEO, absolutely. His schedule is as demanding now as it was 20 years ago," Dan says. "He's very focused ... very demanding in the way he handles himself. He sets the standard by model."