



## MELISSA RICKMAN

WHOLLY STROMBOLI  
FORT LUPTON, COLORADO

### LOCATED JUST ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF DENVER, COLORADO, WHOLLY STROMBOLI IS AN EAST COAST EATERY,

specializing in all of the amazing foods I grew up with, particularly New York-style pizza and stromboli. We are in our eighth year of operation and are very blessed to have experienced double-digit sales growth year over year.

Wholly Stromboli is about old-fashioned values and handcrafted foods served up with hospitality that, unfortunately, you don't see a whole lot these days.

Our culture is rooted in family values. We treat our team with hospitality, and they treat our guests the same way. Hospitality has to start from the bottom up. Unlike a traditional org chart, where the CEO or owner sits at the top, Eric and I believe that we are the foundation that supports our team, who then support our guests. We empower each other, support

each other and push each other to learn, grow and succeed.

Community involvement is also very important to our team. Unlike some operators who believe in saying yes to every donation request, we instead pick a few good causes each year and put our whole hearts into them. To that end, we don't just write a check to the local cause, we get out there and get involved, elbow to elbow with our neighbors doing the work that makes our community great!

### CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN PIZZA

— In my experience, a man is looked upon as a good leader if he is strong in his convictions, clear in his expectations and holds his team to a high standard.

As a woman, you can embody those same traits and be called a b--ch, hard to work for or intimidating. Women haven't always held these roles so this can be new territory for women as well as their team and colleagues in the industry. It may be difficult for some to adapt, (and) it is getting easier as the years pass, but can be frustrating nevertheless.

The restaurant business, particularly upper leadership, is a very male dominated business. It can be challenging to fit in with the "boys." Some employees in the restaurant business come from cultures which are not very accepting of women in leadership positions. It can be a real challenge to break through those barriers, but it is certainly rewarding when you do.

As an outspoken woman who isn't afraid to use my voice to ask for what I want, or be clear about my expectations, I can attest to the backlash from employees who say that I am intimidating when they first come in to our organization (or when they first join our team). They say they are not accustomed to a woman who speaks with a candid, honest voice who commands respect.

I expect my team to hold themselves to a higher standard, earn each others' respect, and to excel at whatever they do, but to also feel comfortable using open and honest communication.

One doesn't find much success by complaining about things behind the boss' back. For that reason, I encourage our team to communicate with me in an honest fashion, which I think can be intimidating at first, but very beneficial once it occurs.

In the end, though, much like any other relationship, a work relationship built on open communication and clear expectations is far more successful than one without those traits. Setting clear expectations coupled with honest communication builds a team of dedicated, hardworking people who support Wholly Stromboli's mission and values, which results in unmatched hospitality and a great product food. As a result, we have lower than average turnover, a great base of repeat customers and a successful business.