

3 WAYS ENTREPRENEURS CAN CHANGE THE NEGATIVE STIGMA OF THEIR INDUSTRY



As an owner of a drug testing business, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to shift negative perceptions of your business. I recently navigated the successful opening of my stigmatized business just a few months ago. Through training, franchisee support and first-hand experience, I learned how to make a name for our business that's bigger than the reputation of our industry.

I was just 23-years-old when my husband John and I joined the Fastest Labs franchise back in 2017. Since then, we have successfully grown that business and recently relocated to San Antonio to take over an existing location. I knew how people perceived drug testing, and I wanted to shift the negative perception to one that resembled wellness and transparency. When we opened, I worked hard to change perceptions and learned best practices along the way. As a result, we have set record-breaking year-over-year sales marks. Here's how:

Shift the Narrative Around Your Stigmatized Business

It's no secret that some industries aren't as glamorous as others. Regardless of the industry, franchisees have an opportunity to shift the narrative of their stigmatized business by being transparent and educating their customers while explaining the value of the service.

More often than not, customers will come to your business with some preconceived idea, which provides a unique opportunity for franchisees to connect with their customers by having a conversation. By engaging with your customers, asking what their knowledge of your industry is and providing them with trusted information, you can shift the narrative.

Being strategic in your marketing efforts and offering more educational material over promotional material within your ads and on your website is also key. You should design your messaging to inform versus just sell. Offering helpful and honest information will not only grab the attention of prospective customers, but it will promote understanding, leaving customers with a sense of comfortability. Strengthened communication and transparency with customers will allow your business to gain and build trust.

Create an Inclusive Environment Free of Judgement

At some point or another, we've all visited a business that's made us feel uncomfortable, either due to poor customer service, lack of cleanliness, slow wait times, no seating, etc. Being uncomfortable, for any reason, is dissatisfying, and if your business environment makes customers feel uncomfortable, you can bet they won't return.

When you create an environment around comfortability and openness, your customers are more likely to have a positive, memorable experience. Establishing a personal connection with the customer is critical – one of the best opportunities to establish that connection is through the *experience* with your brand. More attention needs to be placed on perfecting the personalized interaction between the customer and the employee during the visit. As a franchisee, consider ways to personalize each customer experience and create a welcoming environment (*streamline how quickly the customer is serviced, offer complimentary refreshments, give them an offer for next time, etc.*).

Energized and motivated employees who are equipped with the resources they need to deliver on your brand promise will have a direct impact on the customer experience. They hold the power in ensuring whether or not the customer leaves the experience feeling emotionally satisfied. Here are some practical ways we've elevated

our customer experience:

- **Arrival:** Each customer that walks through the door is greeted immediately. We assess their needs and reason for testing. We offer water to everyone, making the experience as pleasant as possible. We walk the donor through the drug testing process, step by step. We usually have the person tested and out the door within 5-to-10 minutes – a quick and seamless experience.
- **Testing:** Fastest Labs employees explain/instruct the client on the process and show them to the testing area/restrooms.
- **Departure:** When the client leaves, they are sent off with a smile, thank you and 'have a great day.'

You only have one chance to make a lasting first impression, and small gestures go a long way. By offering an elevated, memorable customer experience and creating an inclusive environment, you're turning customers' negative perceptions of your business into positive ones.

Get Involved with the Community and Create a Support Network

Opening a stigmatized business in any market is no easy feat. To establish your business within the community, it's crucial you develop relationships and partnerships early on. An easy way to do this is to stop by surrounding businesses and introduce yourself. Consider partnering with other businesses to offer discounts or joining the local chamber of commerce for additional networking and support. By establishing a way to provide value to your community, you create a support network that can be mutually beneficial.

Our strategy is simple: we always go above and beyond for our customers. In doing so, we get to turn a negative or dreaded experience into a memorable and positive one. By going the extra mile for your customers, you'll begin to see a shift in negative perceptions and an influx of new and returning business.

Chelsea and John Smith are the newest owners of Fastest Labs of San Antonio, a non-medical drug testing franchise specializing in drug, alcohol and DNA testing services for private individuals and corporate America. Since taking over the original Fastest Labs location in February, Chelsea and her husband have already made headway in the San Antonio market, breaking yearly sales records. For more information, visit <https://www.fastestlabs.com/>