


# Serving up a strong company culture



**Randy Pianin**  
CEO

## Quick facts

-  **Company:** JAE Restaurant Group
-  **Headquarters:** Pompano Beach, Florida
-  **Industry:** Restaurant/hospitality
-  **Employees:** 7,000
-  **Product:** ADP Vantage HCM, ADP DataCloud
-  **Award:** ADP Meeting of the Minds 2021 Client Award for Culture at Work

## Introducing the CEO

My name is Randy Pianin. I'm the CEO at JAE Restaurant Group. We have 220 restaurants and over 7,000 employees. It's a big employee base, but we strive to treat each employee as if they're the only employee that works for us.

We've grown through acquisition. A key part of the integration is to have each new company feel like they're part of the JAE family. Our philosophy is that if we believe we are the employer of choice, our employees will deliver great restaurant experiences for our guests. Then, we'll become a restaurant of choice. And as a restaurant of choice, we'll deliver the sales and profits needed to be the investment of choice for our owners and our financial partners. So, we use those as guiding principles in everything we do.

## Culture is a hard thing to define

We're a people-first company, we strive to be the best we can be. We empower our employees, give them the tools they need to do their job, and then let them succeed. We believe in development. It's important to me that we have a great place for employees to work, grow and have a career.

JAE Restaurant Group is the owner and operator of Wendy's restaurants throughout Florida, Texas and Tennessee. The group is committed to being an employer of choice and giving back to the community. Hear from the CEO as he shares the rollercoaster year and challenges the group faced in 2020, and how the culture and inherent values of the JAE team got them through it.

Learn more about JAE Restaurant Group at [jaerestaurantgroup.com](http://jaerestaurantgroup.com)



## Supporting our employees with training and development

As a company, we invest in technology, people and programs to become an employer of choice. We've recently implemented a new management staffing model, which provides a defined career path of promotions and progression for someone who first enters the restaurant. This is more than working a job in a restaurant, it's a career.

We invest in a lot of training at both the Wendy's and JAE level. We have a comprehensive training program in addition to on the job training and what we call quick huddles, which are very fast, quick hit types of trainings on specific issues. We've also invested in technology that allows all the data points needed to operate a restaurant, to feed into one massive database with a balanced score card that makes it easy to see how the restaurant is doing in all the key performance indicators, all in one place.

Developing a company culture isn't something you do overnight, it evolves. One of the first things I noticed at JAE was the culture. I remarked to the owners that one of the previous companies I worked for spent millions of dollars with large consulting firms trying to build the culture we have here at JAE.

Culture starts at the top with commitment from owners and senior leadership on what they want to be and stand for, and they have to live that out every day. They have to model it for the rest of the organization and take steps to help make the change.

## Giving back to the community and being a JAE Star

One of the key cornerstones of the culture and the values at JAE and at Wendy's is giving back to the community. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is the charity of choice for the Wendy's system, and we do a lot of activities to help drive fundraising and awareness. We've also raised money for St. Jude's and worked with Big Brothers and Big Sisters. During the holidays, we collect food, toys, clothing and blankets for local shelters and other charities. It feels good to give back and that's part of who we are at JAE.

When I talk to people about joining JAE, the first thing I talk about are the people and the culture. You can find many people with qualifications to do a job. It's much harder to find people who are the right fit for the organization. We've been so successful and developed our culture by finding people who are the right fit and share similar values as the organization. We are a very diverse organization, and our success comes from our underlying and shared values important to JAE.

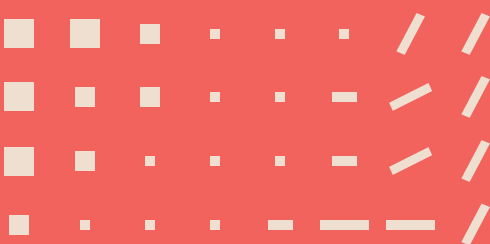
A JAE Star is someone who embodies our values: working as a team, doing the right thing, having good intentions and giving back to the community. When we see people doing that, we give them a lapel pin that says, "I'm a JAE Star." We make t-shirts and highlight employees who exhibit these qualities. It's just another way to recognize employees and show them that we appreciate what they're doing and how they're doing it.

## ... and then came a pandemic

2020 was a year of mind-blowing challenges. It was my first year as CEO. We launched our new breakfast. Then, COVID-19 came into the picture. We dealt with increasing government regulations that were changing daily. We helped our employees get comfortable coming to work in a rough environment. We redefined working with our vendors and financial partners.

As COVID went on, we experienced a beef shortage. Wendy's only serves fresh beef, never frozen. We had to adjust our operations and promotions so we could feed our customers with strained supply of one of our key items and keep sales going. We also had to deal with civil unrest, an election year and, because of where we're located, we also had multiple hurricanes. So, it was clearly a challenging year.

I can honestly say, I'm glad that 2020 is over and looking forward to a less drama filled 2021.



## The importance of communication and supporting employees

When COVID hit, I had to sit down and say to myself, "You got a lot of things to figure out. You have to do it quickly. There are 7,000 people relying on you to help get the company through this crisis." That's a lot of soul searching. I quickly pulled together my team. I was on daily calls; it was a full team effort. Everyone was willing to do what was needed as long as they understood what was happening.

Getting an organization through as many challenges as we did, I truly believe starts with the culture of the company.

- We kept all our employees on the payroll and working, albeit shorter hours, because some municipalities were closing restaurants early. We were deemed an essential business, so we were operating.
- We had an employee appreciation superhero-themed week because the folks working in our restaurants were superheroes during the COVID crisis.
- We instituted hero pay to allow for temporary pay increases during the most critical times, free food for the employees and partial, guaranteed bonuses for some of the management team.
- We started a program to help get our employees paid quicker. Employees can work today and get paid tomorrow. Having access to pay as quickly as possible is critical to some of our employees.
- And we do what we can to make sure the employees understand that their work is valued and is a key part of the JAE success.

Every day, we try to do something a little bit different to make it fun and exciting and to thank the employees. There's trust between the owners, the management team and our employees. We truly have a family atmosphere and we help one another. It was very important for us throughout all of this, for employees to know we understood it was hard. We did big and little things to show understanding and appreciation. To me, that's what helps build the culture, the trust and loyalty.

## What it means to lead through a crisis

When you sign up for a job like the one I have, you are assuming responsibility for the performance of the company and the people who help drive that performance. This is not just a job. This is a lifeline for many of our employees. If they don't work and we don't pay them, then they can't put food on their tables. Through the good times and through the tougher times, you have responsibility to do what you can to keep the company and the employees going.

That's how the leadership team and I looked at it from the beginning. We did what we could. We realized it was

very hard for the employees in the restaurants, in addition to traveling to work, having to worry about COVID. Wearing masks, wearing gloves in a hot restaurant is not an easy thing.

We added tools to help us manage the labor with the reduction of sales. Through our reporting, we adjusted the restaurant and drive-through hours to maximize efficiency. As we adjusted the business, we were able to operate at a more profitable level. And then, sales started to come back as the world began adjusting to this new normal.



## Choosing a payroll provider

In addition to everything that happened in 2020, we also implemented ADP. The implementation team and project leadership team were great. They were available to help with anything and everything we needed. Payroll and HRIS system implementations are never easy. I greatly appreciate the responsiveness and partnership we had with ADP through the process.

We switched from our previous provider to ADP because we wanted a certain level of service and functionality that we weren't getting. ADP is a comprehensive payroll and HR solution. There are items we outsource to ADP and they get done right and on time, and that's important for someone like me. Payroll, taxes, things like that have to happen. I can't worry that they're not going to get done on time.

One of the areas that attracted me to ADP was the people during the sales process, and the team members we had to help carry us forward. They had a true desire to help us solve our problems and for JAE to succeed. I have no issue picking up the phone and I know that ADP is willing to help us. That's very important to me because some of my previous experiences with other companies were completing tickets and never having human interaction. That's challenging in a fast-paced business world when issues, particularly payroll issues, have to be addressed immediately.

## My advice to other companies on choosing a payroll system

Since I've been with JAE, ADP is our third payroll system. Reflecting on the different systems we've had, it's important to understand what it is you're looking for, first and foremost.

- **Are you looking for an outsourced solution?**
- **Are you looking for just software?**
- **Do you want everything to be done outside?**
- **Do you want a partial outsourced, partial in-source model?**

Understanding what you want out of your HR and payroll system is paramount. Take the time and invest in consultants if you can't do it yourself to figure out what truly is needed. Then you can go and listen to what each solution has to offer.

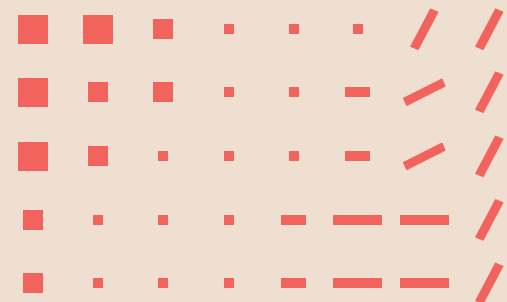
In addition to listening, you need to see functionality. You need to speak with both companies who have used it and are continually using it, as well as companies who have used it and have left it because not every solution is the right solution for every company. Learning why it's worked and why it hasn't worked is important when evaluating any system, but more importantly, HR and payroll because they're so important to the organization and they're very difficult to implement.

I am thankful that we switched to ADP. Every quarter my payroll taxes get paid on time and every time I look at the app and I can do what I need to do quickly and easily, I'm happy we chose ADP.

## The benefits of an ADP partnership

ADP is a key component in making life better and easier for our employees, both in the corporate office and in the restaurants. We've put a system in place that works. There is functionality to the ADP system that provides productivity and efficiency to our employees.

The best thing I like about ADP is the app. That's how I use ADP on a day-to-day basis. I don't ever go on my computer. I always use the app. The ADP app is important for a business like JAE because many or most of our employees, are out and about. The management team spends a lot of time on the road in the different restaurants. The folks in the restaurants don't always have access to a computer. The app allows us the ability to get the information we need, if people want to check pay, vacation, deductions; if they need to approve vacation time or communicate, the app allows us to do all of that on the go.



## Coming soon

I'm excited about the time and attendance module that's in the process of being rolled out. That will be a game changer for us and I'm anxiously awaiting that rollout. I'm excited to leverage the ADP tools and the data inherent in the ADP system to help us drive greater employee engagement, greater employee retention, and just overall happier employees.

We're in appraisal season internally, and we're in the process of rolling out performance management. I'm looking forward to moving away from an antiquated method of doing appraisals and performance management and using a sophisticated tool that will help us provide greater feedback and greater development for our employees.

## Winning the ADP Culture at Work award

JAE is very excited to have won this award from ADP. We've worked very hard to develop the culture and build our teams and getting recognition for that is always exciting. When I look at the vast client base that ADP has, and that JAE was selected is even more gratifying, because I know ADP has a lot of really great customers.

## To my JAE team and family

2021 and beyond we have high hopes of going back to some level of normalcy, which is focusing on driving great restaurant experiences for our customers without having to worry about a raging pandemic or civil unrest or any of the other challenges from 2020.

Thank you to my employees for everything they did in a very, very difficult year. They persevered and we created a better company that had greater profitability than 2019, which is amazing in light of everything that we went through.

When I look at what we've done over the last year, including implementing ADP, we've driven greater employee engagement scores, reduced turnover, and seen greater staffing levels. Everything we've done to focus on employees has helped move our company forward and build a stronger organization.



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