



## Jack's BLEND

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Last month, I shared ideas of how to survive during tough times, like what to do when revenues are down and customers are cutting back: trim staff, closely adhere to financial ratios, try new things and implement unique marketing ideas to increase store profitability.

I also urged you to examine product quality and make it the best it can be by updating or implementing a barista training program, getting your baristas to pour latte art and differentiating yourself from stores not focused on quality.

To reinforce the whole "quality wins" mindset, I want to share a February article from the Associated Press called "Cup of Competition: Small Cafes Holding Their Own" by Ramit Plushnick-Masti. The article says, "Many small cafes are enjoying double-digit profits, opening new shops. ... Economists are baffled by the phenomenon. They say it could be part of a backlash against large corporations ... and a move by consumers to carefully choose where to spend each dollar and opt for what they perceive to be a high-quality cup of coffee made by a well-trained barista."

Although economists are baffled, I'm not. It isn't difficult to understand if you love great coffee. People are tired of drinking dregs and paying \$4 a cup for it. They'll go the extra mile and pay the extra dime for quality. Economists think this is a backlash against corporate greed. I believe it has much more to do with a corporate tolerance for lower quality, many of the big chains' inability to produce quality and consumers "voting with their dollars" for the local, quality-focused coffee shop.

So, what is quality? How do you know if you really have it? And, how do you get there if you don't have it? (When I say coffee I include espresso, automatic drip coffee or other brewing and serving variations.)

First, coffee quality has parameters. Although we may not agree on which is the best coffee, we should come real close on best practices in preparation, a close range of coffee-to-water ratios, proper equipment; agreement on staff training as well as other critical issues in preparing and serving great coffee.

Second, just because someone thinks he knows quality and says he serves quality and talks about what great coffee he has, doesn't mean it's great coffee. The online coffee forums I read include posts from people talking all about their quality coffee and espresso, but it doesn't mean they really serve it. Many people learned from coffee roasters or equipment sales people who got it wrong. Some started well and failed to follow

through. Some people just put their head in the sand because they don't want to do the work, don't like change or don't want the expense that serving better-quality coffee entails. Some people just don't care.

### **Here is a list of variables in creating great coffee:**

Start with great coffee — Get samples from your roaster and three or four other roasters with great reputations. Brew them side by side and compare to your current roaster.

Filter your water — Buying great coffee and then mixing 1 percent coffee with 99 percent water makes great water an absolute necessity.

Evaluate your coffee grinder — Are grinder burrs replaced frequently? Is the unit clean and in good repair?

Evaluate your brewing equipment — Is your brewer outdated? Does it properly extract the coffee flavors? Does it brew hot enough? Is it clean and in good repair?

Do you brew into a thermal container? If so, make sure these containers are cleaned regularly.

After your coffee is brewed, how long does it sit before you dump and re-brew? I recommend you test it yourself, but suffice it to say, anything more than 90 minutes is probably an issue.

### **Here are the basic ingredients for great espresso:**

Start with a great espresso blend and filtered water.

Do you have great quality espresso grinders? Do you clean them daily?

Do you have an appropriate espresso machine that is clean, in good repair and maintains a stable brewing temperature?

The make or break items — Do you have a culture of espresso excellence fostered by you the owner?

Do you have a thorough training program for staff with standards that must be achieved?

Do you evaluate your products, your processes and your quality on an ongoing basis?

The above list is incomplete. Not because I wanted it to be, but because there is so much to learn and because excellence is not a destination, but rather a journey. There are many skilled and learned people in this industry who can add to this list and many sources from whom you can learn. For a start, we have compiled a list of associations, magazines, forums and more at <http://mbs.jpcoffee.com/resources/>. If you have any additions you would like to suggest for our list please e-mail me.