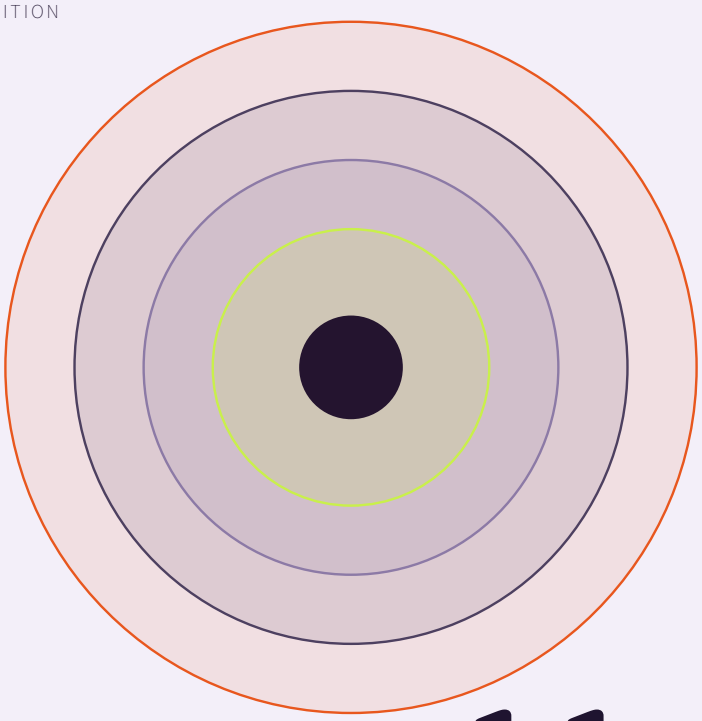


Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect

A reading of the book by Will Guidara (2022)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Will Guidara ran the dining room at Eleven Madison Park in New York, first as general manager and later as co-owner with chef Daniel Humm. Under the two of them it grew from a well-regarded restaurant into the No. 1 on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list in 2017. The book argues that service is doing the job correctly, while hospitality is how people feel about it, and that the second is what they remember. Its working tools are the 95/5 rule, which keeps most costs tight so the last few percent can be spent generously, and Legends, personal gestures built from something a guest let slip. Guidara tells it through stories from the restaurant, his early years at Danny Meyer's company and lessons from his father, a restaurant executive, and argues that it applies to any business or team.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Service is getting it right; hospitality is how it made them feel.

Guidara calls service black and white: the right dish, at the right table, at the right moment. Hospitality is the colour, the part that makes someone feel seen. A great place needs both, but people tell stories about the colour.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Manage 95% of your costs to the penny so you can spend the last 5% foolishly.

This is the 95/5 rule. Tight control of food, labour and waste is what pays for generosity that never shows up as a return on a spreadsheet. Discipline and extravagance work together here, not against each other.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The most memorable gestures start with listening, not with a budget.

The best-known Legend in the book began when a table mentioned that the one New York food they had never eaten was a street-cart hot dog. Guidara bought one from a cart outside, and the kitchen plated it as a course. It cost a few dollars and became the part of the meal they talked about.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A Legend is made for one person, not rolled out to everyone.

A gesture works because it could only have been for them. Once it becomes a standard perk that every guest gets, it turns back into service. The point is to fit the gift to the person in front of you.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Make generosity someone's job, or it stays an accident.

The restaurant created a Dream Weaver role: a person whose work was to turn details the team overheard into surprises for guests. Giving the idea an owner, time and a budget is what made Legends happen every night instead of now and then.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Your team will treat guests the way you treat your team.

Guidara argues that hospitality has to point inward first. A team that feels cared for, trusted and listened to has something to pass on. A team that is only managed passes on management.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Intentionality means deciding every detail on purpose, even the ones nobody will notice.

Guests rarely name the reasons a place feels right. They feel the sum of many small choices made deliberately. Leaving a detail to default is still a choice, just not a considered one.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

An unreasonable goal changes how you work on an ordinary Tuesday.

Guidara and Humm set out to become the best restaurant in the world long before any list said so. The goal mattered less as a trophy than as a standard: it made every small choice worth arguing about.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Hospitality is a conversation: read the table before you decide what it needs.

Some guests want theatre and some want to be left alone. Guidara learned this at Danny Meyer's company, which owned Eleven Madison Park when he arrived. Good hospitality adjusts to the person instead of running a script at them.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Work out your 5%
- [ ] Start a Legends list
- [ ] Map your black and white
- [ ] Name a Dream Weaver
- [ ] Fix one detail on purpose

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Listen for one clue a day
- ◯ Deliver one small Legend a week
- ◯ Treat your team as guests

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Work out your 5%

Pick one place you serve people: your customers, your team or your household.

Look at what you spend there in a month and set 5% of it aside for gestures that have no return attached.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Start a Legends list

Open one note on your phone.

Give each person you serve a line, and add what they love, what they have never tried and what is coming up for them whenever you hear it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Map your black and white

Write down the five steps someone goes through with you, from first contact to goodbye.

Mark each one as merely correct or as memorable, and choose one correct step to add colour to.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Name a Dream Weaver

On a team, give one person the job, a little time and a small budget for turning overheard details into gestures.

At home or on your own, take the job yourself for a month.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Fix one detail on purpose

Find one thing in your space or process that is set by default: the hold music, the welcome email, the chair by the door.

Decide how it should feel, and change it this week.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Listen for one clue a day

In each day's conversations, catch one detail someone mentions in passing and add it to your Legends list before the day ends.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Deliver one small Legend a week

Turn one clue from your list into a gesture, unannounced and made for that person alone.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Treat your team as guests

Once a week, give a colleague the same attention you give a customer: notice what they need and do something about it before they ask.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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December 2026

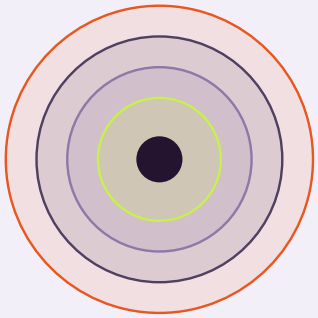
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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Get the basics right in black and white, then spend a little foolishly on colour.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER WILL GUIDARA

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways:
hourlife.com/books/unreasonable-hospitality
Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect · The reader's edition
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