

James Skinner

Former CEO of McDonald's and Executive Chairman Walgreen Boots Alliance

Understanding McDonald's "Special Sauce." Legendary CEO Jim Skinner shares hard-won lessons from his 41 years with McDonald's. Stressing that a change in leadership doesn't mean a change in strategy, when he became CEO, Skinner implemented a back-to-basics turnaround strategy that focused on growth through increasing sales at existing stores rather than by opening new locations. Guided by a zeal for satisfying customers, Skinner modernized the restaurants, improved the experience, and revolutionized the menu, even at the expense of his own ideas and preferences (he disliked the McDonald's new coffee cup lids, but customers loved them). With a discipline learned from 10 years in the United States Navy, Skinner and his transparent approach to management created an environment where McDonald's success didn't depend on customers "trading down" during the recession. Instead, they are "trading in" and still spending more money at McDonald's even as market conditions improve. In his presentations, Skinner discusses the McDonald's revitalization story and takes us back to 2003 when the company "took our eyes off our fries." He shares the important leadership principles and the effective strategies that helped him turn McDonald's around, like keeping your brand modern, the importance of a robust consumer insights strategy, innovation and continuous improvement, having a leadership pipeline, and his passion for execution.

Leadership Development. The push for talent development and leadership development may be Skinner's greatest legacy at McDonald's. One of his core management beliefs is that leaders should always be grooming at least two potential successors, and diversity and inclusion play an important role in the company's workforce—it's not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do. Skinner, who was a 'right-hand man' for years, never feared his No. 2, and went out of his way to surround himself with "people that were smarter than [him]." In his presentations, he details how to develop winning talent and a succession plan that will ensure an organization's success for years to come, all while sharing fascinating stories from his legendary 41-year career at the world's largest food service retailer.