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Overview of Rusty Taco and AES Restaurant Group, LLC.
Rusty Taco© is a fast-casual taco restaurant chain founded by Rusty Fenton in Dallas, Texas in April 2010. The brand has over 38 locations in 12 states with two more coming in the next few months. Rusty Taco focuses on taco stand-inspired street tacos with an emphasis on high quality ingredients, a "rough around the edges" brand approach, and brand history. Locations are known for their welcoming vibes and high-quality tacos and Margaritas. Everyone is welcome at Rusty Taco!

AES Restaurant Group, LLC. is a restaurant franchisee group founded in September 2004 by John Wade. The Attitude Equals Success (AES) group owns over 150 Arby's locations making it the third largest franchisee group of Arby's in the world. AES believes that "As with any goal we will set, our attitude about achieving those goals can equal our success." The company prides itself in believing in its people and working on goals by having a great attitude toward them. AES is the owner and franchisee for the sole Indiana location of Rusty Taco and has shattered company records since its opening.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of Rusty Taco and AES Restaurant Group, LLC.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Primary Research:
Rusty Taco Corporate Interviews:
- Brendan Mauri (President)
- Andrew Hyde (Marketing Director)
- Corey Will (Franchise Business Coach)
AES Restaurant Group Interviews:
- Mark Poppinga (General Manager, Lafayette)
- John Wade (Owner, Chief Executive Officer)
- Jay Bedrosian (Partner, Chief Operating Officer)
Employee Survey + In-Person Interaction

Secondary Research:
Rusty Taco Corporate Internal Documents:
- Brand, Design Style, and History Guide
- Target Market Presentation
AES Restaurant Group Internal Documents:
- Employee Benefits Guide and Handbook
- Company History Guide and Calendar
Academic Journals from Universities
Industry Leaders’ Journals and Statistics

Rusty Taco Locations
-38 Total Locations Across the USA
-Two Additional Locations Coming Soon
-Fourteen Franchisee Groups with Stores
-Five More Franchisees Coming Soon
-One Ghost Kitchen in Atlanta, GA
-One Stadium Location (US Bank Stadium)
-One Food truck

Research Methodologies
Objectives of the Research
We utilized different objectives throughout our research to stretch our process to many categories, ideas, questions, thought processes, and plans. Our research gave us an inside look at Rusty Taco corporate's employee experience standards as well as how AES treated their employees in the first two years. The interviews with corporate and AES leadership allowed us this opportunity, while the employee experience surveys gave us a look at what it is like to be an employee at Rusty Taco Lafayette. By combining the data and interviews, the primary research was completed. Our secondary research, which included combing through online sources such as academic journals and restaurant leader's perspectives, allowed us to see an overview of the industry throughout COVID-19.

Findings of the Study

While sifting through the findings of our primary and secondary research, we found that by grouping our data into three main categories, we could then make even stronger conclusions before developing our strategic plan provided later in the document. To create our groupings, we looked at the data and picked out the three top categories in which each piece of evidence, answer, or figure fit into. These groups turned into the overarching basis for our findings, and these are listed below:

- **ECONOMIC GROUP**
  - Our economic group of research dove into the questions mostly in the employee experience survey. These questions were based on what AES could do to better the employee experience. A large percentage of employees who answered wanted a pay raise. Our interview with Branden Mauri also gave us information for this group.

- **SOCIAL GROUP**
  - The social group of research looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their work as well as how much they were satisfied with the current employee experience in terms of people and schedules. Cooks and cashiers were the least likely to give their experience a high score, as all the respondents in this group gave the experience a seven or lower.

- **MENTAL GROUP**
  - The mental group of research sought to look into Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in terms of our employee survey. Many questions were based upon the theory, and the results supported a mental grouping of data on its own. Although a small margin, there were respondents who did not feel respected, which affected their attitude at work.

Conclusions of the Study
After a thorough research process that included primary and secondary sources, it was clear that Rusty Taco Lafayette has a few areas of improvement that are necessary to create a better employee experience. We utilized TACO, a redesign of the SWOT Analysis, to group together conclusions that influenced our strategic plan. Better scheduling of complementary skills and personalities, better training for interactions between employees and the management team, as well as a way to increase wages without adding onto the strong hourly pay, were all a part of our conclusion sets.
Objectives and Rationale of the Proposed Strategic Plan
The overarching objectives came from the research findings and conclusions developed later in this report. The three keys to success are Scheduling Employees with Complimentary Skills and Personalities, Creating More Impactful Training Programs, and Improving Wages (Indirectly to Raising Hourly Pay). The three objectives are what then led to the RUSTY plan.

Proposed Activities, Timelines, and Key Metrics + Indicators
To create a memorable and creative plan to increase employee morale, we formed the acronym RUSTY. RUSTY stands for Review the Current Training Program in Place, Understand the Basics of Data Dome Tests, Shift Data Dome Basics to Shift Workers, Test and Pilot New Tip Programs on POS, and Yield Final AES Dome Junior Program and POS. By following these steps, we can thoroughly investigate, review, and improve the employee experience at Rusty Taco Lafayette.

SAMPLE TIMELINE OF EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENT
January: Purchase premium website features to host testing components. Work with AES to design a new page on their already provided website and begin compiling questions and answer sets to get the best data possible.
February: Create testing interface and begin writing the summaries of sessions.
March-April: Begin data collection with current employee pool. We will then use this data for 3 test rounds to make sure the test system’s data collection is accurate.
May: Begin the use of the AES Dome Junior system in training for new employees.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS
There are several key qualitative performance indicators that we will use to check our progress. This includes, but is not limited to, interviews over several months to check in on employees completing our skills assessments and personality tests as well as retests on the AES Dome Junior to check for quality assurance and to make sure the test is accurately scoring the participants.

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS
The quantitative performance indicators are mostly to be used to measure the effectiveness of the new tip POS systems by Verifone. We will work on creating financial statements that will track the increase of income for the employees who went from no tips to receiving them on a daily basis to tell how well the new system works. An increase of five to six dollars per hour is our goal mark.

Proposed Budget
Our proposed budget is split between the different portions of the RUSTY plan while also spreading itself across 2 years. Year 1 will include many of the startup costs necessary to create the new training program, AES Dome Junior test, and to set up the new Verifone tip terminals. The cost for year 1 will be $32,800.40. This includes all expenses on a monthly, yearly, and one time basis. Year 2 will have a smaller budget due to the expense of startup costs already being dispersed to AES. Year 2 will see the continuation of the monthly and yearly costs expressed in the year 1 budget and will lean toward $21,910.40. The total for the 2 years will be $54,710.80. As a result of their employee investment, the Chief Operating Officer believes they will cut employee turnover by 67% the second year of the plan being in place. Overall, an increase in sales will be noticeable due to improved morale among employees, which will turn into a better customer experience.