

Things Every Restaurant Manager Should Know

Employee Management Techniques

Getting them to want to do what you need them to do

The best leaders are those that lead from within. They are not directing the staff from behind the scenes. They, with the help of the staff are ensuring that every single customer leaves unable to wait to tell their friends if the incredible experience they've just had. They are the Servants of those they lead. Their purpose is really just to enable the employees to do the job they know how to do, as effectively and as efficiently as possible. Dave works for us, we work for the staff, and they work for the customers. If you adopt this attitude, you will develop a staff that will take a bullet for you, and certainly will have no problem doing anything that you ask of them.

Respect is given freely, not demanded

Managers who intimidate or give direction without explanation will not go far in this company. You can't force people to respect you. You can only conduct yourself in a manner deserving of respect and hope that they recognize it. Be patient and explain your reasons for asking them to do things. Nobody likes to hear, "Because I said so, that's why."

Challenge them

We all tend to play to the level of our competition and rarely are our "A" game demanded of us. However, it is at those times that we are all at our best. It is the slow times of service where often the most mistakes are made, so how do we keep our edge during those slow times? Feel free to quiz the staff. Keep them on their toes. Pull some wines, rum, tequila, etc. down and conduct an impromptu tasting. Ask them about the best meal they've had within the last year. Get them thinking about food and service. If all else fails, get them doing some projects for the betterment of the restaurant. And, get your hands dirty. Do it with them. You are not only their leader but you are also an integral part of the staff.

Throw Fish Every Day

If you've seen the FISH! video, you know what this means. If not, it simply means to have as much fun as possible while you are at work. Be goofy. Play! Figure out how to get the whole staff smiling, better yet laughing on their way to the table. The staff's outlook and mood will reflect your own. Laughter is contagious. Leave your problems at home or the shift will suffer. I know that there are a million things to get done and there's really no good time to do them. But, not one employee or customer should be aware of this.

You get from people what you expect

When we are looking for failure that's what we'll see. We all make mistakes. It is how we fess up to them and remedy them that set us apart from the rest of the restaurant world. Expect the best from people and let them know that you think they are capable of greatness, and that's what you will get from them. Nitpick them and ride them all night and you will get resentment and no desire for the restaurant to be any more than ordinary. If they are not doing the job that you need them to do, sit them down at the end of the shift and discuss it. Always start with something that you like about their performance and then let them know where they are falling short. Don't wait for an employee review; fix it now before it becomes a problem. If they get away with something that they shouldn't and there are no repercussions, they will try it again and again.

Catch them doing things right

It is all too easy to dwell on the negative and only see the mistakes that people make. When we focus on positive reinforcement, we create a culture of doing the right things. It seems cheesy at times but we, as managers, must find things on a day to day basis that deserve credit and praise them for it. Do not however give praise when it is undeserved. This just makes you look like a dopey corporate drone.

Praise in Public, Correct in Private

If you see someone doing something right, let them know it as loudly as possible in front of all their peers. When you receive praise, you only want it more and more. When you see others receive praise, you get jealous and try to do whatever you can to get some of that. When you need to offer a correction or some negative feedback, take them aside so that no one else can hear. No one likes to be called out in front of their co-workers. The employee will respect that you are not trying to make them feel bad, but are only trying to better their performance for the benefit of the restaurant.

Emotion as a seldom used tool to get your point across

My dad rarely got mad at me when I was a kid. But, when he did I knew there was a reason for it. Ninety-nine percent of the time your corrections and feedback should be delivered as emotionlessly as possible. It is better that they leave feeling that you were disappointed in them not angry. Be patient and communicate clearly. Then, when you need to get angry, you will be heard loud and clear and not simply seen as a manager who is just angry all the time.

You cannot have happy customers without happy employees

Staffing Levels/Scheduling

Make the most of their time without selling yourself short

Whether you are writing the schedule, or just debating on whether or not to call people off, you are in control of the staffing of the restaurant. Feel free to cut people early as long as you are sure that you won't regret it. Having a floor staff that is always on that razor's edge of being spread too thin ensures that everyone is at their peak. However, cutting the expeditor, a busser, a host, two servers and a bartender at 12:45 on a beautiful but slow Sunday afternoon is only asking for trouble. Service is paramount. We can't have a bunch of people standing around doing nothing, but at the same time we can't as managers, greet, run food, bus tables, take orders, make drinks and answer the phone. As far as hiring and schedule writing goes, have enough people on the schedule to make them just a little hungry for shifts. It sucks to be short staffed and not be able to find anyone to pick up a shift

Hiring/Firing

The Weeding out Process

While it is true that 9 times out of 10 when mistakes are made, it is because the training was incomplete; there are occasions when we have just chosen the wrong people for the job. Through a careful interview process, we try to hire only the best and the brightest. However, sometimes an unpolishable turd slips through the cracks. We owe it to ourselves and to the restaurant to get these people out as soon as possible before they can misrepresent us further. We must give these people the feedback they would need to be successful and when they fail to meet our expectations, we should call them into the office with another manager present and let them go before their shift, before they tarnish our image in the minds of another 100 guests.

The Interview

We are always looking to bring strong people into the company. We should always be looking for replacements for the bottom third of our staff. Who is our weakest link? Who will be our next strongest link? People come through our doors every day. We must take the time to give them a 3 minute interview. You will know in 30 seconds whether or not they would be someone who would fit in. If they should be considered, write a few notes on their resume and file it. Granted, if they come in during lunch or dinner rush, don't have a resume, didn't shave, didn't bring a pen, smell like a bong, or decided not to drag their butt off of the couch and opted instead to make a phone call to inquire about a position, tell them to beat it; as nicely as possible.

Reference Calls and the Law

When someone calls for a reference on a former employee, legally all we can say is whether or not they are eligible for rehire. If they were great please feel free to say so. It is our duty to make sure that our kids that move on to bigger, better or different things are given every opportunity to succeed. But if you're thinking about saying anything negative, it would be best to keep it to yourself. One thing we don't need is to be caught up in some sort of defamation of character or slander suit.

Training and Coaching

Train thoroughly and test often

Our training process for front of house employees includes shifts at every position and is as thorough as any in the industry. We demand that they possess a ton of food and wine knowledge and we give them ample tools to learn. We could do better in the area of quizzing them on their knowledge and following up on their

training. To challenge them we could ask that they deliver a presentation at shift meeting on an ingredient that is coming into season, etc. Give out quizzes with the payroll. If they know their stuff, the test shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes. If they don't, we should find out why and act accordingly to correct.

Course Corrections

90% of unacceptable behavior or performance can be addressed with a "one minute correction" at the moment it happens. Read the "One Minute Manager" if you haven't already. For the 10% that can't be addressed then and there because it may rattle them and cause more mistakes, wait till the end of their shift, but no longer. Give them feedback while the night is fresh in their minds. There are a precious few "teachable moments" in our interactions with the staff, but this is one of them.

Employee Reviews

Reviews should be conducted every six months and are a great way to open the lines of communication between management and employee. They should always feel free to speak their mind without fear of repercussions. It is also a great time to lay down the law for that employee that just never "got it" and to lay the groundwork for a future termination if necessary.

Set them up for success, not failure

You are the leader of the shift. You must let them know what to expect and what you expect in terms of their performance. At shift meeting, talk them through the day. Let them know when you expect the rush to hit and when, if at all, cuts will be made. Get them psyched. Think of yourself as the coach of a football team down by 21 at the half.

Help them but don't do it for them

As managers we will help out throughout the course of the shift. We will run credit cards, deliver drinks, and recite specials or whatever it takes to help a server or bartender get out of the weeds. We should never ever make them feel bad that we have to help them. This would prevent them from asking for help when they truly need it. But we don't want to create a team that comes to rely on the manager's help. In a perfect world, they would be helping each other, but this is not always the case. When you lend a hand, let them know what you've done so as not to throw off their rhythm. And explain to them how they might avoid falling behind in the future.

Customers

"Problem customers"

In my experience, there rarely is such a thing as a problem customer. They usually just have very specific ideas of how their experience should be, and get irritated when we fail to live up to that expectation. However, there are some whose purpose in life is only to see how much free stuff they can milk us for. How do we tell the difference? It's next to impossible, so it's always better to err on the side of "killing them with kindness."

"Raving Fans"

This book, as well as almost anything else written by Ken Blanchard are must reads for all management. Basically we are in the business of creating "Raving Fans" of our restaurants. They should be so happy with us that they become raving lunatics, fanatically demanding that all their friends must try our restaurants as soon as they can.

Make molehills out of Mountains

Overreacting to a problem is never the answer. The customers and staff alike take their clues from us. If we forget to ring in an order and they've got to get to a movie, get them a cup of soup or salad and wrap up their entrees to go. Let them know that they're on us and sneak a little dessert into the bag just to go the extra mile.

Nordstrom's

One of the best customer service models there is. If they don't have what you're looking for, they'll get it. Each and every employee is empowered to make sure the customer leaves happy and raving.

Creative Problem Solving

There will always be customers for whom everything didn't go right. Whether it is a hair in the food, or a spilled glass of red wine, how we address these problems is what will keep them coming back. Go above and beyond. If they ate most of their meal but didn't seem pleased, not only buy it for them, but give them a promo to come back and try another entrée that may be more to their liking. If the end to a truly perfect meal would involve a cappuccino, but we don't have a machine, get them one from the coffee shop next door. (Zolo

excluded) If they sit down, look at the menu and decide that they'd rather go somewhere else, help them find a place, in fact call ahead and get their name on the waitlist. They will be shocked and awed by this gesture and just might become a customer for life

Just meeting expectations doesn't cut it

People can go almost any where and get reasonably good service and palatable food. We must snap them out of the haze that they're in by smashing their expectations. This is hard because we have continued to raise the bar in our respective dining communities. We must however figure this out.

If they want you to succeed, they will overlook small mistakes

This is perhaps the best way to ensure a restaurants success. Make sure that your customers are on your team. If they feel like they are part of the restaurant, they will want you to succeed. If they want you to succeed, they won't mind when the waiter forgets a pre-set. We must establish friendships with our customer base. It is one of several things that make us different.

Touch Every Table

One other thing that you get in our group is manager contact. We are out on the floor, working the room every night. We introduce ourselves, we find out a little bit about them, and we make sure that they'll be back. Whether just to check in and see how they are enjoying their food, or to give them a big hug and ask how their kids are doing, we must make contact with every customer that walks through our doors. We must always try to connect on another level besides that relating to food service.

Food Poisoning Claims

Rarely, a customer will call saying that we have gotten them sick. How we treat is phone call is very important as all it takes is a phone call from them to the Health Department to make a lot of extra work for us. Listen, be sympathetic but never accept responsibility or admit guilt. Find out what they had, what time they were in, who their server was etc. Let them know that we will immediately check with the chef and ensure the safety of our entire product. Get their phone number and address. And let them know you'll call them back. Talk with the chef or sous chef and check out the appropriate items. Try to reproduce their check from the POS system and see how much they had to drink. Call them back and let them know that you and the chef have examined everything and all appears to be in order. It could be that something just didn't sit right with them. Don't bring up the fact that 5 mojitos very well could have made them sick. Let them know that we had sold 50 plus of the dish they had, and that theirs was the only phone call. Tell them that we hope they feel better and that we would love to put a promo in the mail for them so that they might try us again.

Charge Disputes

Every once in a while someone will call to say they were double charged. 80% of these are just due to two amounts being authorized on their card when in fact only one was actually submitted in our credit card batch at the end of the night. Some people think that their server is trying to steal from them. They are crazy but we should tell them that it is just a computer mistake. Once again get all the info from them, try to reproduce their check and look for anything out of the ordinary. If a check was split two ways yet only one card was charged twice, we screwed up. If everything looks ok, apologize that we may have to make them jump through some hoops and direct them to the bookkeeping office.

Dry Cleaning Claims

One of the oldest scams in the book involves bringing phony dry cleaning tickets to restaurants for reimbursement. The only way to combat this is to make sure that whenever there is a spill, we give the customer a signed business card stating that we'll reimburse. They must present the card with the receipt to be paid back.

Organization

"7 Habits of Highly Effective People"

Read it, learn it, live it. Spend more time doing things that are not urgent but important (that bring us closer to our goals) as opposed to things that are urgent and unimportant. Anticipate and be proactive not reactive. Save moves; think like a bartender; never have empty hands. If you're going back to the office to get someone's paycheck, ask the bar if they need change, etc.

"Managing by Values" Read it.

Product Knowledge

You have to be the one who knows the place better than anyone else. You must be the person who can do everybody's job as well as they can if not better. You must be the smartest one in the room in the following areas:

Kitchen Stations-Food prep/ingredients

Bartending-Wine, spirits focus, specialty drinks, the Cheers mentality- a place where everybody knows your name

Serving-Not an order taker, but a tour guide through the best that we have to offer

Bussing, Expo, Host

Working the Floor

Triage, You Can't Be Everywhere at Once

Whatever directly affects the customer is your top priority

Setting the Mood

Always be conscious of all aspects of the dining room. How is the lighting? Is the music too loud? Does it fit the customers? Use all your senses. Take a lap around the building and come back in. See the whole picture from the customers' eyes.

The Sphere of Awareness

Some servers are only aware of goings on at one table at a time. Others can easily have a sense of their whole station. A good manager can feel what's going on not only in his restaurant, but has an awareness of what's happening in his competitor's. See the whole picture, look for uncommon movement, become part of the matrix.

Floor Shifts are for working the Floor. Office days are for doing office stuff

It is imperative that we are on the floor when we are supposed to be. It is what makes us different. It is very easy to get caught up in scheduling and to miss an entire afternoon rush. But where were you when the staff needed help? Who made contact with all the tables? What mistakes were made?

Maintenance

There are quite a few maintenance issues that should be able to be addressed in house. Whenever possible, grab a screwdriver and fix that leaky faucet, hang those shelves, and change that light bulb before calling an electrician. Tradesmen are very expensive and the group cannot afford to pay to have a phone plugged back in to the wall or a handle screwed back on to an oven door. Please do all that you can to learn a little about the following, or at least identify those on your staff that may be able to help.

Plumbing-Leaky faucets, hot water heaters, etc., water shut-off

Lighting/Electrical-broken dimmer switches, circuit breakers, glass washers

HVAC-using the thermostat, butterfly valves in vents

Light Carpentry-Hanging shelves, fixing doors

Refrigeration-troubleshooting ice machine, keeping condensers clean

Keg System-what causes foamy beer

Soda Fountain-flat soda?, tonic water

Equipment-gas shut-off; know a little bit about all cooking equipment

Security

Alarm System-you may be placed on the call list. This does not mean that you have to go down to the store to check for signs of break-in

Safe-keep it locked at all times

Security Staff/Doormen-know what to look for in fake IDs, know how to kick people out without creating conflict

When to call Police/Ambulance-better safe than sorry, if someone faints, get them down there

Who to call/what to do in case of emergency-pipe burst, fire, etc.

Broken window/Door Repair-

Burglary-If you are ever in a robbery situation, give them the money, a good bottle of tequila, the keys to your car and anything else that they might want. We don't need heroes; we have adequate insurance coverage for this eventuality.

Information Technology-You are expected to develop proficiency in the following:

Excel-Familiarity with our spreadsheets and the information they provide

Word-Writing clear and well laid out training materials for the staff

Publisher-Menu layout and design

Xerox-Use this beast to create less work for yourself, not more

POS System

Creating Menu Items/Modifiers

Sales Categories

Employee Maintenance

Payroll

Reports

Printers

Credit Card Processing

Troubleshooting

E-mail-A great way to communicate to the staff. Let them know about meetings, get shifts picked up, etc.

Financial

Budgets-Estimate our sales and use this estimate to set goals for staffing and purchases

Pour Cost

How to Calculate

How to Control

Controlling Theft

Food Cost

Labor Cost

Vendors/Delivery Drivers

These guys have the biggest mouths in the industry. It is crucial that we never indicate to them that business is anything less than great. They are the ones who may make special trips back to the warehouse to get product that we may have forgotten to order. Treat them as you would any other employee; with respect and friendliness and they too will be there for us. There are rare times that orders are dropped without being checked in. If they like us and are on our team, they will not short us.

Marketing

Being Entrepreneurial- This is a business, and you should treat it like your business. Always be looking for ways to increase traffic through the door

Effective Advertising-Most print advertising is a waste of money. We have thousands of people per week walking through our doors that can easily be marketed to. They already love us and they want to know about any special events that we have going on. Get on the ball early with check presenters and posters. Don't forget about the guest check tagline.

Creating the Buzz

To whom should our message go?

Slightly controversial without pissing people off

Pushing the Envelope

Selling Private Parties-This is where we can make a ton of dough if they are handled correctly. We must follow through with estimates in a timely fashion. These people are shopping around and if we don't get them someone else will. When writing an estimate, first look at the space in the restaurant that they will be taking up, what it would usually generate in sales in that time frame, and how much of an inconvenience it would

create to the regular traffic. If they require special menus, get the chef involved. It may be a way to increase per cover sales. They may need to change their orders for the week to accommodate extra traffic, so keep them in the loop.

Discounts-They don't work, they only devalue your product and when the discount is gone, so is the traffic. We must create something they want to pay full retail for.

"22 Immutable Laws of Marketing"- Another good bathroom read

We have a pretty amazing little group of restaurants run by great, like-minded individuals. We may have different ways of approaching specific problems, but the end result is the same.

We are here to exceed the expectations of customers and staff alike, every minute of every day.

What sets us apart is integrity, sincerity, and ability. We hold ourselves and our staff to the highest standards. We care whether or not our guests love us. We won't accept "fine" as an answer. We ask specific questions and open ourselves up to criticism. "What could we have done better?" is a question you should be asking yourself, your guests, and your employees all the time. We value individuality in both our concepts and our employees. But, there are standards for service and quality that we never dip below. We try to hire thinkers; people who don't necessarily play by a rule book, but whose instincts when faced with an unfamiliar problem are right-on. Customers come to our restaurants to be treated like family, to be educated and to share this experience with their friends. We will give them this every day.