



Strategies for Managing Today's Foodservice Workforce

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



Retain valued team members with sound leadership practices

In 1995 the Food Network was born, and with that the traditional foodservice world we once knew was transformed. We have all felt the effects of this, but I got to experience this firsthand as a culinary instructor. I taught for two years in a national multi-campus culinary school. In those two years, I saw student after student come in and tell me that they didn't need to learn about safety and sanitation, knife skills, or any other introductory course because they were going to be on the Food Network. They felt they needed to jump to the advanced courses so that they didn't waste any time.

This is not an exaggeration, and it's why more than 80 percent of the students that enrolled in the program(s) didn't reach graduation. In fact, over 50 percent didn't even last beyond the first semester.

As an industry, we are struggling to find people to work. Part of this is because of the unrealistic expectations of some people. They see the glitz and glamour of the online and televised culinary world and think that is reality—until they get in and have a rude awakening. Then they realize that the foodservice business can be tough. Working long hours, nights, weekends and holidays, and working when everyone else wants to play, are not necessarily what most people seek.

UNDERSTANDING OUR EMPLOYEES

The reality is that many of the people who work in this business have to work in this business. Hospitality is the default business for many people who can't get hired elsewhere. In the starting roles, we don't require degrees or experience and we



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are always hiring. Some of our service people are using this industry as a stepping stone to what they presume are bigger and better careers. For many people, working in food service is a means to an end in the form of a way to supplement their income.

The flip side of this is that the people who are choosing to work in this business truly *want* to work in this business, and they get great satisfaction from serving others. Some altruistic employees enjoy preparing food as a means to nurture our most vulnerable populations. They are in it for more than just the paycheck.

Whatever the reason, understanding what motivates your individual foodservice employees may be the most important key to managing your team. Once you know what motivates someone, you can then craft the position they are working in to benefit both the employer and employee.

But before you get to this point, you need to be the kind of leader that your employees want to follow.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

People want to follow dynamic and caring leaders. Leaders they respect and who inspire them. They want someone who practices what they preach, listens and follows through, and is humble

enough to know when they are wrong and willing to admit their mistakes.

As managers and leaders it's important to understand what our staff needs and it's our job to give that to them whenever possible. Our employees will not be successful until they have the tools they require to get the job done right. We need to serve our employees by being the kind of leaders people want to follow. They desire leaders who will jump in and do what must be done in the tough times, and be consistent in both praise and behavior correction.



THE MANAGEMENT FORMULA

Once we understand our staff and become the leaders they need, we need to manage them. Here's the formula that I have used throughout my career (in every segment of the industry):

(Standards + Accountability) Consistency = Success

Standards are the benchmarks and expectations we set for our staff. When we create these in conjunction with our staff members they feel that they are part of it and then buy-in more fully. But standards don't hold any weight unless we are able to hold people accountable for them. Accountability is the way we make sure that our standards are being adhered to. When we combine and use standards and accountability together, we are setting ourselves up

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for success. But the most important part of this equation is being consistent. That's why the equation is standards plus accountability times consistency equals success. The more often we hold people accountable to our standards, the more consistently successful we are. It's easily said, but very difficult to do.

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WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Success is relative. What we see as success, others might not. What I have found though, is that success in food service is generally defined as smooth-running operations with managers and employees that are happy and feel that they have a quality of life.

The foodservice industry (regardless of which segment we are in) is very difficult in comparison to other industries. But does it have to be?

When we look at the things that make this business difficult, much of that comes from employees. What I mean is either not having enough people, employees just not showing up, team members calling out and/or not performing to our expectations, etc.

If we look at the companies that have fewer of these challenges, we realize that they are following this management formula. They understand their staff and they manage them. They set

standards and hold people to them... consistently! Employees know what to expect when they go to work and they don't worry whether management is going to be in a good mood or not. The leaders are consistent and professional, and they quickly stomp out any drama that might arise.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

The first step leaders must take is to start with a self-assessment. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you the type of leader that employees want to follow?
- Do you lead by example?
- Do you get your staff the tools they need, when they need them?
- Do you know what motivates your staff?
- Do you help them set goals and help hold them accountable to accomplishing those goals?
- Do you have standards and are they communicated to the staff clearly so that everyone knows exactly what is expected?
- Do you hold people accountable to those standards?
- Are you doing it consistently?

After determining your strengths and weaknesses, it's time to focus on correcting your deficits while protecting the strengths that make you a good leader. And it's important to remember that not every employee responds to a leader's traits in the same way. That said, most employees want to know what is expected of them, want to be a contributing member of the team, enjoy praise when due, and respect someone who is a good example and "walks the talk."

Your reputation as a good, fair leader will go a long way when it comes to hiring for your department, building loyalty among current staff, running the foodservice program effectively, and increasing your own opportunities for advancement. There's no down side to being an effective and respected leader!

CONCLUSION

Managing employees is not an easy task, regardless of the business you are in. The foodservice industry in particular is especially tough, and employee issues are some of the most draining challenges to deal with. Employees can be our greatest source of joy, or the well-spring of misery. Becoming the type of leader we ourselves want to follow, and learning to manage our employees in a systemized fashion, can put us and our departments on the path to lasting success. ■



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