



How to train your staff for operations success

Getting the right people for the guest proposition you offer is the most important step in giving your guests great service. Once you have good people, you need to turn your mind to getting the most out of them.

Great trainers take people with the right DNA and train them to do what needs to be done in a way that gets results. “You hire for attitude and you train for knowledge,” says Frank Hennessey, President of Bento Sushi.

Well-trained staff are able to consistently execute your service practices. Think of all the things a front-of-house or a back-of-house teammate needs to get right every day. It can be a mind-boggling list, and all of it gets done by staff who make a few bucks over \$10 an hour.



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Training does cost time and costs money. So why do it, why train? Why not just be fussy and only hire seasoned staff? A few good reasons include:

- Overall labour costs can be kept in line by bringing in new staff and bringing them up, using your turnover to keep your average rate affordable
- Seasoned staff come seasoned with bad habits and cultures that may not fit, and
- Menu changes and cross training require that you train; you best be good at it.

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Attitude + knowledge

Restaurant operators that do not train their staff find it hard to find good employees. Why? Because they are fishing in a much smaller pool for pre-trained prospects to staff their restaurants. Attitude and DNA first; skills and knowledge second gets better results.

When you go to a restaurant, you can see the effects of poor training. Some of the “tells” include:

- Staff that are unaware of what is on their menu, what is in it, how it is made and how it tastes
- Incorrect orders and inconsistent food and beverage that “just does not taste or look right”
- Slow and disorganized service, even when it is clear there are plenty of staff to go around

Deciding to not train your staff can actually cost you more. When you do not give people the tools they need to do their job they either fail repeatedly or they eventually leave for a better place to work. Both results can cost restaurant operators money from:

- Lower guest counts, as guests take their business elsewhere
- Spending money and time to recruit replacements for the people that are lost, and
- Suffering through the slow throughput and service failures that come with “green staff”

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Set clear standards

So how do you train someone in our business? Well you need good, clear standards on what needs to be done and how to deliver your service proposition to the guests. You also need to remember that “people people” learn in ways that match who they are. Good people need time to practise and nothing works better than by mirroring how the best get things done.

What does not work? Some things that do not work very well include:

- Big, long, written manuals with lots of big words and no pictures; if hospitality staff were big technical readers they would not be in our business
- Yelling at, intimidating and criticizing staff; effective training is not Boot Camp, nor is it a loud and boisterous reality TV show
- “Throwing them in there” and seeing how they do. No one wins when new staff get in over their head

At the end of the day, great operators are also great trainers. They are credible, consistent, trustworthy, and more than anything, they are “worth following.” Great training will make you a lot of money in your restaurant. Do without it at your peril.

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Five techniques for turning your restaurant staff into a high performing team

In a restaurant, every employee has a vital role to play in creating a great dining experience for patrons. If your team isn't working together effectively, or individual members aren't pulling their weight, the whole establishment suffers. Poor team performance is also likely to impact individual employees, resulting in dissatisfaction, lower performance, tensions or animosities, and higher turnover. Conversely, when working on a high performing team, people feel supported, better enjoy their work, and are likely to be more efficient, engaged and productive. All of this is great for business. So how do you turn your staff – who typically have different skills, abilities and perspectives - into a high performing team?

Here are five things you can do:



1. Define clear performance expectations for each role

Understanding individual roles is the first step to being part of a high-performing team. Ensure every staff member to know what their role is, what's expected of them in terms of performance, what support they can expect to receive from others and how their work impacts the team and the restaurant as a whole.

There are three formal ways you should communicate this information to your staff: job descriptions, competencies and individual goals.

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Five techniques for turning your restaurant staff into a high performing team

2. Train and cross train staff

To build a high performing team, it's important to provide everyone with training in their particular role. Training should be used to address skill gaps and should also broaden or deepen existing skills or develop new ones. And remember, training takes many forms. It can include formal classroom training as well as job shadowing, mentoring, reading, observation, webcasts, podcasts, etc. Different training media help you accommodate your staff's learning style and availability.

When you're building a high performance team, it's also important to cross-train team members. Cross-training allows an individual to "walk in someone else's shoes" and gives them a broader understanding of the workplace and team. It's a great tool for building team relationships and strengths. You could have a waitress work a few shifts bussing tables or doing prep in the kitchen. It's also great to get managers back in the trenches doing their employees' work. Cross-training staff in this way invariably gives them a better understanding and deeper appreciation of the challenges their team mates face – and results in better teamwork and communication. It also results in a stronger, more nimble workforce who can fill in for one another in a pinch.

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3. Gather feedback on performance from team mates and patrons

In a restaurant, with its busy work environment and varied shifts, it's almost impossible for a manager or supervisor to have a deep knowledge of each of their employees' performance. By gathering 360-degree feedback from those who work most closely with each employee, you can get a better perspective and understanding of their performance. You can also better understand how the employee is functioning on the team, and how they are perceived by the team. In addition, you can use feedback from restaurant patrons – either on the performance of an individual, or the experience created by the team. This invaluable information can help you and the employee maximize their performance as well as the team's and address any problems.



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4. Recognize and reward high performance

If you want to encourage strong team behaviour and performance, recognize and reward it.

Get everyone on board with this initiative, encouraging praise, "thank yous" and recognition for individual work well done, in support of the larger team. If you recognize and reward individual good performance publicly (in front of the team) rather than privately, your acknowledgements and rewards can serve to motivate the entire team to perform. And when the whole team is performing well, it's important to recognize and reward the team as a whole, not just the high performing individuals.

These five techniques are basic employee performance management best practices that foster employee high performance. In a restaurant, where you need everyone working together as a high performing team to deliver a great dining experience, they can help to improve both individual and team performance.

5. Give staff ongoing feedback and coaching

Every employee needs to hear, on a regular basis, what they are doing well, where they can improve and if there's anything they should stop doing. By giving all your employees ongoing feedback and coaching, you help improve their individual performance, as well as the team's.



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