



THE LIFE AND SOUL

Ensuring you've got the right workforce on board for your brand is key to any restaurant's success, so invest in your people now

Excellent customer service, paired with high quality food at reasonable prices. Surely this would be the mantra of the casual dining sector? These are key terms that are rattled off continually, yet they carry such weight. How is it even possible to consistently deliver this experience to customers, and supersede their expectations on a regular basis?

"Well trained, enthusiastic and competent staff are a valuable asset, and can help a business by delivering improved efficiency, enhanced levels of service, reduced staff turnover and improved margins," states Mike Worley, operations director at HIT Training. "It's vital that individuals are given the opportunity to progress in order to help them stay motivated and keen - a clear career path also helps businesses retain staff as they feel inspired to climb the career ladder."

Many restaurants also have different aspects to their offering, so as well as general front and back of house skills, many employees now also need to become specialists in a variety of areas, training as baristas, mixologists, sushi makers and chefs that can cook in front of customers using specific equipment.

People with potential

Before you even begin to recruit staff, be it in head office, kitchen, or on the restaurant floor, you need to establish a vision of what you will

be looking for.

"When looking to expand, make sure you hire people who fit into your view for the future and not only the present," advises Marcos Kapulno, training centre of excellence manager at Evolve. "Adaptable staff will be more likely to stay a little late, jump in and help others, and are also keen learners."

Running the restaurant every day can prove tricky, let alone the options that are now available to operators, such as running pop-ups, mobile kitchens, multiple restaurant openings and working in smaller spaces with high cover turnover. You need the right people on board to deliver the best service.

"For us initially it is about recruiting and selecting the right people who will also become ambassadors," shares Gemma Boulding, recruitment manager at Las Iguanas. "Once they have joined us, we ensure they receive the necessary training to allow them to be confident in their role and in turn provide the guest with the best possible experience."

Recruiting new members of staff can often be a difficult and lengthy process, and we're all used to seeing stories about the high number of applications received for roles coming up in new restaurant openings.

"Firstly, be clear on what the role entails and the ideal person in the advert," suggests Kapulno. "Be clear on the requirements for the role so that you can reduce the applications that will not be of use to you."

Using sites like LinkedIn and hospitality-specific careers websites will also entice

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people serious about a career in the industry.

Be rigorous

If you care about your business, you won't hire just anyone for roles that become available.

"Over the last five months alone we have received in excess of 10,000 applications, and with three more restaurants opening within three weeks of each other we are anticipating this will increase dramatically," explains Boulding. "We have a tough recruitment process, which includes a pre-screening questionnaire, interview and psychometric testing, but it works."

Las Iguanas tries to ease the whole process by using a 'bounty bonus' scheme, and advertising on its own website for applicants also allows the company to attract a more dedicated workforce.

Trial shifts can be tricky. If you've got a brand image and customer service expectation to uphold, letting loose a newbie who isn't officially on the force is a risk.

"Before now we have never offered trial shifts; however, we understand the importance of giving potential new team members the opportunity to experience what Las Iguanas is like to work for before officially joining us," reveals Boulding. "With this in mind, we are in the process of rolling out something similar to trial shifts in the form of working sampling."

People that are recruited correctly and thoroughly will often be happier in their job as the role is right for them. But once they're part of the team, what can be done to ensure they stay loyal and committed to your restaurant?

Turnover a new leaf

In the past, jobs in the restaurant industry have been linked to high turnover and low motivation, with staff on slightly lower wages and working long hours relative to other sectors. But in recent years, operators have turned around mighty brands and given each a unique personality that people are proud to be part of. Training and career progression plays a vital role in making this happen and is an element to employment that everyone takes to differently.

"This is personal to each staff member; some seek promotion and others like consistency," clarifies Kapulno. "Evolve would always advise that there is progression for staff available. Internal promotion often saves money on recruitment, as well as rewarding good performance. It encourages other staff to strive for the same and often means the newly promoted staff are more loyal."

But operators shouldn't feel pressured to promise grand plans of career progression to its employees, setting realistic goals instead.

"It's not vital," agrees Ian Forrest, commercial manager of CPL Online. "However, promotion opportunities can be interlinked into either a career pathway or just based on course completions."

It may be an idea to merge in-house training with an external provider to ensure that promotional plans for large or small workforces are seen through to completion. Often, restaurants need a little guidance to provide their staff with secure and reliable training to strengthen and expand on their own skills and qualities.

"The quality of our training was good but I wanted to offer our staff more soft skills training as well as deliver compliant training in the most efficient way possible for the business," explains Eddy Passey, operations director at Red Hot World Buffet, which has used CPL Online training courses for its staff due to its visual nature that helps employees who do not speak English well.

"I needed to underpin the natural abilities and knowledge of our staff with formal training," he adds. "We can give our employees a blended training solution, enhancing the existing on-the-job coaching."

Optimal training will no doubt be a carefully balanced mix of theoretical training and practical application, and this can be applied to new employees and those progressing within their role at a restaurant.

"It is important to cover the theory side of training, as a new starter needs to understand why things are done a certain way in order to buy into what we are training them on," clarifies Lucy Percy, head of training and development at Las Iguanas. "We find it best to verbally test a team member to ensure they have a complete understanding of a topic or area. Practical training on the job then gives them a chance to practice what they have learnt and also demonstrates that they have completely understood it."

Once new starters feel fully integrated and are confident in their roles, their knowledge and capabilities should be examined regularly to aid their progression within the company.

"Whether you choose to outsource your training or deliver it in-house depends to a large extent on your internal capability," highlights Steven Pike, managing director at HospitalityGEM.

Regardless, clear career pathways need to be in place for those joining an operation.

"We have a policy to promote from within wherever possible and this is shown as our

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entire operations team started in our sites as managers," says Percy. "Also, of our 38 head chefs, only one has been recruited externally and all the others have progressed from different back of house positions."

Being able to prove that there are real prospects of promotion and that a culture of supportive opportunities is promoted at every level of your business will breed a healthy outlook among employees.

Heads up

Things should be no different at head office