

# Looking At Labor In Food Service Today

HELP WANTED! HELP NEEDED! HELP!

An important postulate food service operators should be every mindful of is **"Employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction..."**

It's a fact of our service-oriented business that customer (or "guest") satisfaction is the ultimate key to operator success. The relationship between your employees and your customers is critical. Love and take care of your "help" and they will love and take care of your customers.

Food service workforce challenges are many.

There is a shortage of labor.  
There is a shortage of competent labor.  
Nearly 40% of our labor pool is under age 25.  
57% of the labor is under age 30.  
Unmarried employees represent 52% of the mix.  
Women predominate the workforce (57%).  
Hispanic employees are growing rapidly in food service (especially the back-of-the-house... at times as high as 90%)

Other ethnic groups are on the grow... (i.e. Asian, African-American).  
Turnover is staggering (i.e. 250% in QSR, 175% in FSR).  
There is an incredibly high cost of turnover to operators.  
The industry has a poor perception of career advancement.  
Huge amounts of money is spent on training annually.  
Language is a serious issue and challenge.  
"Work ethic" (especially in the back-of-the-house) is on the decline.  
And more...

Couple this with high levels of competition for employees from supermarkets, hotels, resorts, hospitals, mass merchandisers and other retailers And it's easy to see the hurdles food service operators must cross to win with workforce.

Lots of words have been used, however, **"Attraction," "Retention" and "Engagement"** are the three most notable to define the challenges.

I define the primary labor issues as the **"H.E.A.R.T."** of workforce, namely,

**H** Hiring  
**A** Attraction  
**E** Education  
**R** Retention  
**T** Training



Once a food service operator masters the art of "hiring," "attraction," "education," "retention" and "training," that operator is likely to move closer to succeeding with service and employee proficiency.

Going back to the postulate **"Employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction..."** the objective, then, is to accomplish what we refer to as the state of **E<sup>3</sup>** or **Exceeding Employee Expectations**. The following is a handy guide and list of "compelling imperatives" designed to help you exceed employee expectations and achieve high degrees of employee satisfaction.

Stress the **IMPORTANCE** of each employees' position. Make your workers believe you believe they are vital to the operation's success. Everyone wants to feel important!

Develop all employee programs and "perks" with a **MARKET-DRIVEN** positioning in mind. In other words, don't provide employees with programs and benefits YOU want to provide them with. Provide them with the programs and benefits THEY truly want. Perhaps let an employee task force work with management on benefits they seek.

Craft and implement a written **E<sup>3</sup> PLAN**. There's a future for those who plan for it. Don't make your employee satisfaction program impromptu or spontaneous. Think it out. Write it down. Possibly publish it.

Commit to spirited, ongoing **EDUCATION**. *"When you're through learning, you're through!"* It is a proven FACT that employees embrace employers that invest in ongoing employee education. By the same token, it makes for a more efficient, effective operation.

Provide employees with "R&R." No. . .NOT "rest and relaxation."

In this case, "R&R" is **RECOGNITION** and **RESPONSIBILITY**. Go out of your way to "recognize" (perhaps publicize throughout your crew, put announcements in newsletters, place accolades on bulletin boards, etc.) achievement and high levels of productivity. Also, whenever an employee receives "responsibilities" (i.e. a special assignment, a select few receiving keys to the front door, permission to drive the company vehicle, etc.), that employee feels much better about his/her self and is typically more productive (and "engaged").

Be a "carrier" of the most positive **ATTITUDE**. You can't expect your workforce to be energized, spirited, inspired, upbeat and positive if you aren't. It has been said, *"Your ATTITUDE, not your aptitude, effects your altitude!"*

Embrace **TECHNOLOGY** as a way to communicate to/through your organization more effectively. Technology can be a huge tool to assist you educate, train, motivate, appraise and communicate to your team.

**INCENTIVES** are vital to inspire workforce. The key to putting incentives on performance in your food service operation is to make the incentives relevant and important to your workers.

Cash "seems" to be a driving force in motivating employees (especially hourly employees), however, there have been some incredibly successful promotions implemented using gift certificates, clothing, gas coupons, premiums and more.

Obsess with providing only the highest level of **VALUE** in every thing you do with and for your workforce. The more "value" you can provide an employee (position importance, job security, tenure, incentives, education, etc.) the greater their productivity and loyalty.

Focus on perfect **EXECUTION!** Everything in life (and business) is 5% idea and 95% execution. Your great ideas, programs, benefits, plans and incentives will be unsuccessful if you aren't committed to flawless execution.

Unfortunately, most food service operators slam very few resources against what is, perhaps, the most important company asset they have. . .workforce! Once you accept and understand the correlation to satisfying employees with satisfying your guests (customer), you've taken the first major step toward building a highly effective, service-oriented business. A little planning and a lot of focus will move "Help Wanted!" and "Help Needed" into some productive, effective "Help!" for your organization.

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