



Success in the Front-of-House

How to Whip Your Restaurant into Shape



Everyone has a very specific role to play in a restaurant. You know this. That's why you hired servers, bussers, expos, and many others to fill different responsibilities for the Front-of-House of your dining establishment.

You've also given them the training needed in order to do their job and make you money. They were taught that the customer always comes first, that food and drinks are served as soon as they're ready, and teamwork is important.



Did you know that hiring and training seasoned staff will only get your restaurant so far? Like with any other business, regular care, attention, and maintenance are required in order to keep it thriving.

Whether you've been in business for a few months or for years, there's always something you can do to improve and grow and learn—it's these elements that are crucial for your restaurant's continued success. Putting a trained team in place, creating a menu, and opening your doors are only just the beginning.

Below you will find our tips, tools, and recommendations for how to improve your business in ways you may not have expected.

Chapter 1: Who Are You?

You've got a team of employees equipped with a solid service background and who have been trained on how to do their job at your establishment. That's all that's needed, right? Wrong.

In order for each part of your team to succeed, it's important to first define your business and then you can define how they will each play a role within it.

- **Why** was your restaurant founded?
- **What** style of food do you offer? Why?
- **What** is your unique selling proposition?
- **What** sort of company environment do you want to offer your employees?



Answers to these questions will help you piece together your restaurant's identity and give you a clear direction on how to shape your business going forward.

Once you've gone through those self-defining exercises, then it's time to revamp your brand.

For some of you, this won't be necessary if you've already got a clear vision of your business and offerings, and have been able to translate that into what you do. For others, this is the next crucial step.

Revamping your brand doesn't mean you have to start from scratch. Unless you named your restaurant "Paulie's Shrimp Shack", your logo is that of a star high-fiving a moon, and you want your food offerings to cater to the hipster vegan crowd in town, a major overhaul isn't in the cards for you.

What is most likely necessary though is an overhaul of your menu and other offerings.

1. Take some time to work with the Back-of-House leads to explain your vision and what you really want guests to get out of their dining experience. The food, the pricing, and the style should all jive with who you want to be and where you want to go with your business.
2. If changes are needed to the food or drink offerings, give your menu(s) a touch-up based on this renewed identity.
3. And don't forget to plan out a marketing strategy to bolster this renewed identity for the restaurant. Without the proper marketing to support the vision you have created for your restaurant, you're leaving the power of your identity in the hands of customers who are going to talk about you online and to their friends and family. It's your job to shape this experience for them, so you need to start doing that even before they arrive.

Once you've done all this, the next step is to train. TRAIN, TRAIN, TRAIN.

Chapter 2: Train, Train, Train

Alright, so you've got your restaurant's identity clarified and your marketing pieces are all in place. What's next?

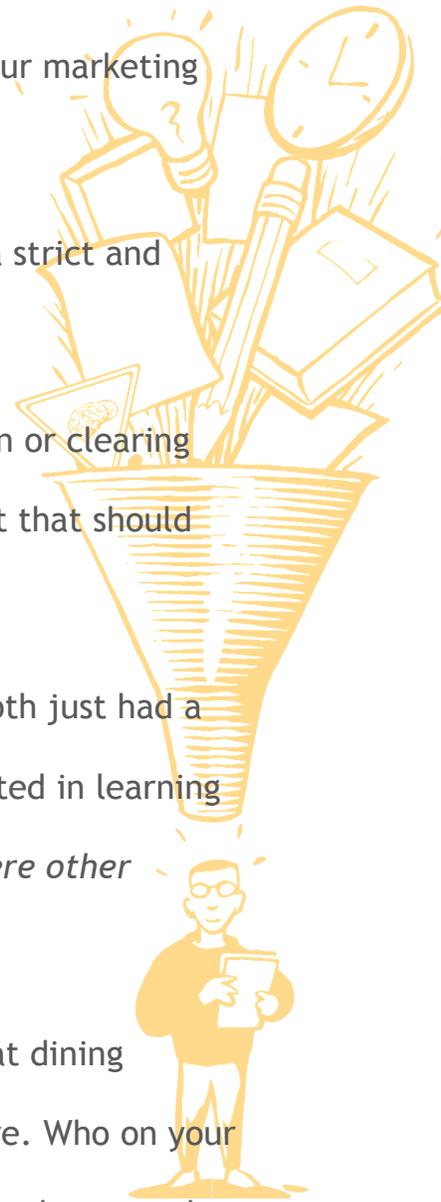
Like with any other successful business, it's important to have a strict and regulated process documentation and training materials.

Restaurants should be no exception to this rule. Sure, waiting on or clearing tables can only really be learned through hands-on practice, but that should not be the end-all, be-all of your staff's training.

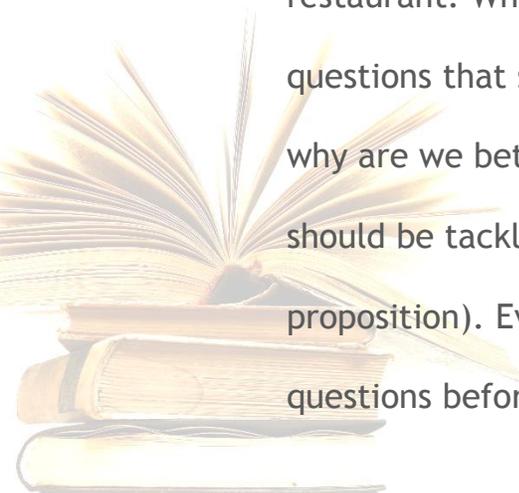
Imagine you're dining out with your significant other and you both just had a fantastic meal at the newest restaurant in town. You're interested in learning more about the place: *"Where did you guys come from? Are there other locations? Has the chef worked anywhere else?"*

These are all valid questions and anyone who appreciates a great dining experience has probably thought something similar to this before. Who on your team is prepared to answer these questions? You? What about the hostess who stopped by to help refill waters and had no idea how to answer them?

It may seem ridiculous to train your bartender on how the risotto is made or to train the hostess on the brewing process behind your top beer offering, but this is what will make the difference between a good restaurant and a great one.



You've taken the time to establish what your restaurant is, and now it's time to share that with everyone else on the team.

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- **Tell your story.** Come up with a brief, yet interesting history of the restaurant. When was it founded, by whom, and why are the first questions that should be answered. What do we do, what is our specialty, why are we better than the competition—these are the questions that should be tackled next and will give you your USP (unique selling proposition). Everyone on your team should be able to answer those questions before they hit the floor.

- **Dissect the menu.** Work with the chef to create a comprehensive menu training guide. This should include every item that your restaurant offers and detail all of the ingredients within each item as well as any special notes on how the dish is prepared and served. A comprehensive knowledge of your food offerings is the essential tool all of your Front-of-House team should be equipped with.
- **Break down the booze.** Whether your alcohol offerings differ from the norm or not, there should be a guide for this too. If you run your own brewery or if you specialize in wine, you should work with the brewer, bartender, and/or sommelier to put together a training guide for the bar,

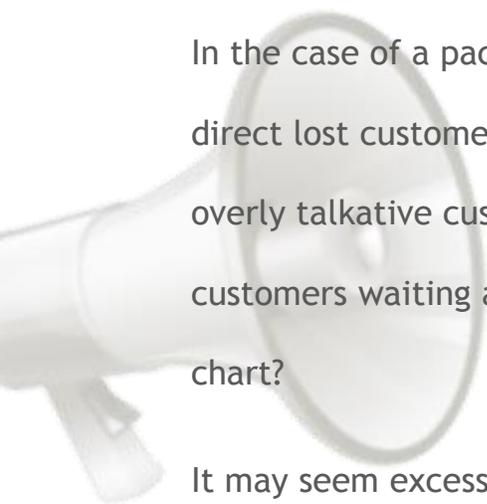
similar to what was done for the food. If you've got standard bar offerings, work with the bartender on creating a guide on different drinks and how to order them.

Once all of these guides have been created and verified by the in-house experts, you'll want to test your team on everything and make sure they're as fluent in "restaurant" as you are.

Chapter 3: A Taste of Everything

There's a lot to be said for documentation and testing, but on-the-job training is just as important—and we're not talking about having your newest server follow around one of the senior servers during a live shift. We're talking about extensive, multi-layered training for all members of the team.

Restaurant orientation



In the case of a packed house, does your food expeditor know the best way to direct lost customers to your bathroom? If your host gets caught up in seating overly talkative customers and one of the servers attempts to help the customers waiting at the host stand, would they know how to read the seating chart?

It may seem excessive to give everyone training on all of the other positions in the Front-of-House, but how else are they to understand the ins and outs of how the entire organism works? Provide your team with:

- an overview of the restaurant layout
- the best places in the area to shop while waiting for a table
- an explanation of the seating numbers and how the rotation works
- a behind-the-scenes look of how the line puts out food orders

- and anything else you think will help in their edification of the ins and outs of the restaurant

It's the little things like this that give your restaurant that extra edge over the ones who don't have a well-organized and educated team.

Taste-testing

Your Front-of-House team now knows what the Ahi Tuna entrée consists of and how it's prepared now, but could they explain how it tastes or properly recommend it to a diner looking for suggestions?

Taste-testing the menu brings all of the menu training full-circle. It's like being able to put a face to the name, and it's crucial in your team's understanding of the food—and experience—your restaurant offers.

If this were a standard sales position for a sneaker company, you wouldn't send your reps into the field without at least having them take a walk around the office in each type of shoe, right? It's the same thing here.

Equip your team with the knowledge of your product line and they'll be able to sell it better than someone who just read about it in a manual. Give them the opportunity to sample the entire menu at least once so they can provide your guests with an honest and accurate portrayal of the product they're about to invest in.

Shadowing

A lot of companies do inter-team or -department shadowing, but usually it's for the sake of having a backup trained in case someone is out. That's a fair enough reason, but more importantly, everyone should have full training on all positions in order to understand the whole picture.

Servers should know how long it takes a busser to clear a table so they can gauge how much time they have to run to the bar before a new table gets sat. Food expeditors should know how long a table greet takes so they can plan to ask that table's server in 30 seconds for assistance with running food out to a table.

It's this holistic knowledge of how the restaurant works and how each role neatly fits into the puzzle of a successful shift that makes your team run efficiently and smoothly.

Every role in your restaurant is just as important as the next when it comes to the customer experience, even if the bartender never interacts with the customer one-on-one. Just because they don't touch their plate or talk to them about the best wine to order with their fish doesn't mean that their role in the restaurant doesn't affect the customer.



Giving each of your staff an understanding and insider knowledge of their own role as well as others is what will give your restaurant the edge it needs to succeed and beat the competition.

Chapter 4: The Bonus

You've established your restaurant's identity, you've created the documentation in support of that, and your team is off and running.

What's next?



Well, you can let them fall into a comfort zone within the roles they've been given. Or you can give them the opportunity to grow and provide them with plenty of opportunities to do so.

Ongoing training - Training should never stop, especially if you expect your employees to stay with you for the long-run. Without continual training and support, you're likely to end up with a high turnover rate and a group of

employees who just go through the motions to collect a paycheck for as long as they can tolerate it.

Restaurant work is not easy. Give your team—and that's how they should feel when they're working together on the floor—all the tools they need to succeed and more. Never stop teaching them about the new special crème brûlée your sous chef created for the month of January.

Never stop teaching them the best way to upsell customers when they ask for a vodka drink. And never stop sharing your company wins with them. The restaurant's win is a win for the entire team.

Pre-shift meetings - There isn't a lot of leeway in the scheduled shift of a restaurant worker, between setups, shift work, running food to tables, answering the phone, and so on. Taking advantage of the quiet before the storm is key in bringing the players of each shift together.

Talk to them about the food or beverage specials going on and give them a chance to taste them. Talk to them about upcoming events they can talk up at their tables (or look forward to themselves if they've got a night off). And most importantly, let them know how much you appreciate what they're doing and wish them good luck. Being a part of a sales and customer service organization (and really, that's what a restaurant is) is a tough gig, and a little positive reinforcement goes a long way.

Incentives - Let's face it, the people in the trenches every day and night aren't making a great deal of money for what oftentimes amounts to back-breaking labor. While it's your job to make sure they've been given every tool they need in order to do a well in selling your restaurant, it's also your job to keep them motivated.

Incentivizing the team is a great way to accomplish this—especially if done in a fun manner. Run contests, offer work-related getaways, provide bonuses and promotions, or give them a free meal at the end of that tough shift.

Give your team the opportunity to shake things up a bit and make their work feel fresh and exciting. A change in pace and a chance to win something does wonders for team morale.

In this day and age where technology is continually evolving and your dining clientele is becoming younger and more impatient and demanding, you can't afford to set up shop, dust your hands off, and hope everything works.

Don't let your restaurant fall into that rut. Like with any other business (or living organism), restaurants require a lot of ongoing maintenance in order to stay alive and keep on kicking. Know who you want to be, train your team to match that persona, and give everyone the tools to succeed and shape your restaurant into what you imagined it **to be**.