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## THE BASICS OF PIZZERIA WAITSTAFF TRAINING

Success is highly dependent on the quality of your pies, and every one of those pies starts with a great crust. But as you know, there's a lot more to running a healthy operation. You rely on great ingredients, word-of-mouth, a comfortable atmosphere, the weather, and so many other factors. One that's highly critical to success is your staff.

Staff members help set the right tone, deliver on customers' needs and expectations, influence loyalty, and enhance your overall reputation. That's a big role, and one that's tough for even seasoned waitstaff members to deliver consistently. This guide provides you some simple, actionable tips to help recruit and maintain staff, and ensure that they're providing the best possible service every day, during every shift.

## TIPS FOR RECRUITING & MAINTAINING WAITSTAFF

One thing many operators forget to do when putting out the word that they're hiring is to set expectations – a step that will eliminate time wasted talking to people who can't fulfill the role. Here are some words to incorporate into your ad to help communicate the type of personality and energy you need:

- “Must be eager to do ‘whatever it takes’ to make each patron’s experience a great one”
- “Should have a naturally friendly, helpful personality and ability to smile under pressure”
- “Should have a positive willingness to pitch in where and when it’s needed”

Here are some statistics that show how important it is for waitstaff to help make a great first impression and exceed customer expectations:

- It takes 12 positive experiences to make up for just one unresolved negative experience (“Understanding Customers” by Ruby Newell-Legner)
- News of bad customer service reaches more than twice as many ears as praise for a good service experience. (White House Office of Consumer Affairs)
- It's 6-7 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep a current one. (White House Office of Consumer Affairs)
- For every customer who bothers to complain, 26 others remain silent. (White House Office of Consumer Affairs)



Avoiding staff turnover, as you know, is a challenge, particularly if your business is highly seasonal (if you're located in a summer vacation spot, for example) or if your biggest potential employee pool consists of high school or college aged teens. But while many of the reasons for turnover are beyond your control, maintaining employees is primarily a matter of treating them as you'd like to be treated. Respect, flexibility when possible, fairness, and good management techniques are all key to ensuring that employees feel valued and wanting to pitch in and help. Here are a few basics to follow:

**Set expectations and follow up on progress.** If you don't specifically tell your staff what you expect of them in terms of attitude, punctuality, attire, protocols, etc., they can't very well be expected to meet your expectations. Make it clear what you need them to do in order to be successful and chances are they'll work hard to achieve that.

**Talk openly - and often.** Your staff won't know if they're doing something wrong (or right!) unless you tell them. Don't miss an opportunity to help them improve, and tell them right away, not a week later. Be honest, be fair, and be level-headed. Constructive input is usually welcomed by staff because most people want to do well in the eyes of coworkers and managers. And to waitstaff, doing a good job directly impacts their tip income potential.

**Use visuals to reinforce your messages.** Sometimes a visual is the best way to communicate and remind staff of policies and other important information. One operator uses a large image of a dollar bill "cut up" to show how relatively small percentage of each is profit. This particular image reminds staff how critical it is to avoid waste and ensure a positive patron experience. You can do the same type of visual to remind workers to wash their hands after handling raw meat, to remind them to smile and recommend appetizers...anything you want to reinforce.

**Don't be best buddies.** It's tempting to want to engage with employees socially as a way to build a stronger tie and more loyalty. But once you're "one of them," you lose some of your power to influence and guide. They'll see you as a friend and not as someone who's invested in their progress.

**Give them the "why."** The difference between saying, "Make sure to wash your hands after handling raw sausage," and saying, "If you don't wash your hands properly after handling raw sausage, you could contaminate other ingredients and transfer a foodborne illness to our customers" is that one is a simple command, and the other is helping them understand the reason and purpose of the command.

**Perhaps the most important training tip is to be a mentor and role model.** You can't really expect anything of your staff that you don't do yourself. You are the best training exercise there is! Show through your actions and attitude what's expected and they'll follow suit.



## BASIC TRAINING TIPS

These are some of the things you need to cover with new employees (and it doesn't hurt to reiterate them occasionally with servers who've been with you a while) in order to start them off on the right foot:

**Create and follow a standard training program** for servers and other staff to ensure consistent performance. In addition to the hands-on education, formalize that training by creating a document each employee can keep and refer to.

**Include safety training.** Some operators focus solely on serving customers and forget to include training on food safety, kitchen/equipment safety, and emergency procedures (like what to do in case of a kitchen fire, how to respond to a robbery, etc.). These are important parts of an overall plan to deliver great food and great service.

**Be clear about job duties.** No operator wants to hear, "That's not my job," but if you don't tell each employee what their job entails, how will they know? If your waitstaff is also responsible for filling napkin holders, wiping down tables, operating the cash register, and prepping ingredients for the next day, you need to outline all of that during training.

**Have them learn the menu inside and out.** Customers often ask, "What's in the sauce?" or "Does that contain egg?" – questions their health may depend on, so it's important your staff knows your food. Others want to know how things are prepared ("Is the dough hand-tossed?") or what offerings are made from scratch. These are all important to selling not just food, but selling the restaurant itself.

**Go beyond these basics of food to familiarize waitstaff about your operation's history, owners, best-selling pies, and other "trivia" that customers may be interested in.**

## TIPS FOR GIVING STAFF ADDED INCENTIVE TO BE GREAT

Here are some waitstaff promotions to consider implementing to engage waitstaff and get them excited about selling, not just taking orders:

**Traveling Ten.** Every time a server upsells a customer to a larger size, give him or her a ten dollar bill. The next time a server does the same, that \$10 passes to that new server. The server holding the \$10 at the end of the shift keeps it.

**Bookend Bonus.** For every table a server sells an appetizer and dessert to, put him or her in a pool to win \$10 at the end of the night.

**Gas & Gift Cards.** Reward the server with the highest ticket of the night or week with a gas or gift card – something everyone can use and will work hard to earn.



Incent the behaviors you want to reinforce. If you want to sell more deep dish pies, that's what you should reward; if it's pitchers of beverages rather than individual cups, that's your target. We all work to do what we're rewarded for most, so focus on that.

## **TRAINING IS AN INVESTMENT IN YOUR OPERATION**

Today, news of poor service spreads like lightning on the internet. Whatever you can do to attract and nurture waitstaff is time and effort well spent. It will pay off in dividends like increased customer loyalty, increased waitstaff productivity, and greater profits. If you don't have a fully articulated training program today, start with these basics and build on them regularly. Follow our blog and visit our website for additional training tips – we're eager to help you build your business, from the front of the house to the back!

