

Restaurants - How to Maximize the Effectiveness of Your Staff

Using Modern Technology to Train and Motivate



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The imminent chef, Alice Waters, is perhaps more responsible than anyone for the revolution in the way we think about food and drink, she has “single-handedly changed the American palate” according to the New York Times.

Driven by visionaries like Alice Waters, customers today are searching for high quality, seasonal, locally sourced ingredients that are developed using sustainable food practices. More and more customers want to know where their food is coming from, how it was made and what impact it has on the environment.

The liquor industry has undergone a similar revolution to respond to new customer tastes. Local microbreweries have popped up everywhere giving customers a local option with an incredible variety of choices. Similarly local distilleries have grown significantly. Cocktails are making a resurgence with many spirit companies adding variations to their core brands to satisfy customer and bartender requests.

All this change has put enormous pressure on the restaurant industry to adapt. With constant change, how does the restaurant achieve their ultimate goal of providing excellent and informed service? When a customer asks, “What is in this dish or cocktail?” Can the server answer the question with the appropriate information that makes the option appealing and makes the customer feel good about their choice. If the restaurant is successful, repeat customers, positive reviews and word-of-mouth will push the restaurant towards improved results.

It’s true that some customers still have simple tastes and just want a cold beer and a cheeseburger, not caring where the ingredients come from. However over time a higher percentage of customers are becoming more discerning with more sophisticated expectations. It’s not uncommon at the local pub for a customer to ask where the ingredients in the salad came from or where the special draft beer was brewed.

I don't think it ever works to tell people what they can't eat. They can do it for so long, and then they fall off. You have to bring them into a new relationship with food.

- Alice Waters

The challenge for restaurants to adapt effectively is significant and requires several steps to accomplish:

- Change how the food & drink is sourced at the restaurant to encourage local ingredients.
- Revise the food and drink menu to take advantage of the new products sourced above.
- Continually train the staff on the new menu items and ingredients used.
- Motivate the staff to be diligent with the training.

For the first challenge above, modern technology can certainly help chefs find local ingredients. A good example is the Farmstand App, <https://www.farmstandapp.com/> where chefs can find local markets to source from. Similarly, the bar manager can use, Craft Crawler, <https://www.craftcrawler.com/> to find local breweries. Many other options are available in the app store and on the web to assist.

In pursuit of this effort, it's assumed the chef and bar manager are highly motivated to educate themselves on the options available and adjust the offerings at the restaurant accordingly. If not, the restaurant will slowly (or quickly) lose customers to those restaurants that are more adaptable. It inspires an evolution reference: adapt or perish.

Once this transition is underway, the chef and bar manager must turn to educating their staff on the changes. This process includes pre-shift discussions, in depth training sessions and vendor presentations. Combined the efforts are extensive and expensive when applied across the entire staff which is on the clock while not earning the restaurant any money. The benefits are

also temporary since the process needs to be repeated every time something new is offered.

The management overhead and expense for the training described above screams for a solution from technology. Virtually every staff member has a mobile device. Can restaurants use that to communicate to their staff? If so, how would that work and what compels the staff to use it other than management telling them to? Logically for the technology to work effectively, it needs a built-in compelling reason to use it otherwise the staff's interest will wane over time. Relying entirely on top-down direction will wear out the patience of the staff.

Ideally restaurants would have access to technology that does the following:

- Designed for the staff member's mobile phone
- Automated as much as possible to save time for management
- Trains the staff on the latest changes at the restaurant
- Motivates the staff to treat the training seriously and sell more

Is this proposition is feasible?

Let's start first with the motivational requirement and work back to training. If the staff isn't motivated nothing else matters. Dead on arrival. To keep it simple, nothing motivates like money. Contests are run at restaurants all the time with tangible rewards for the winners. "Whomever sells the most of this or that earns XYZ".

To work effectively, contests require scoring and leaderboards. The staff members need to know where they stand for the contest to be tangible. Currently managers have to go to their Point-of-Sale (POS) system computer, look up the stats on what was sold, sort them by staff member and rank them. Time consuming. Isn't this what computers were designed to do? No reason the POS system can't send the transactions every day to an external solution so contest scoring can be done automatically.

With automated scoring a possibility, how about delivering the rewards at the end? Technology can generate electronic gift cards "on the fly" whenever a contest is over and send the appropriate codes to the winners directly. No more bothering management for the prize. The code can be sent automatically to the staff member's phone.

Automated scoring and rewards for contests are possible so let's move on to the training component. Training includes the content itself, the presentation of the materials and the consequences once completed. Once again, let's work backwards. Assuming the contests are motivating, the staff members should be willing to take training to and achieve a reasonable score to enter a contest.

Of course, the staff is going to be less than thrilled to go through the training materials. Keeping each module a small, digestible chunk of information that can be completed in 5-10 minutes is ideal. Any longer and the staff will be going cross-eyed. Next

keep it lively and light. Use humorous language when appropriate and write it for a younger crowd. Not every wrong answer in a multiple choice question has to be serious. Make some ridiculous and funny. Makes the test easier of course but well worth it to keep energy up. At the end, the restaurant wants the staff to enthusiastically deliver a few key facts when a customer asks a question about something on the menu.

Is training content the hardest part?

At some level, the restaurant management has to contribute but can the burden be reduced by creating a library of content for them to choose from? Suppliers want their brands front and center with the restaurant staff. If suppliers are encouraged to provide training materials into a library of content, the restaurants can use those training materials whenever those brands happen to be the front and center. Doesn't reduce the training burden on GMs to zero but gives them choices on how to meet their training goals.

How does any useful technology get started at a restaurant and stay relevant with the significant turnover that occurs?

The last topic you could argue should actually have been the first. Typically every restaurant has a few rock stars. The process could get started by inviting these stars to the technology via their cell phone numbers (with approval). Then from the POS data where the rest of the staff names can be derived, a contest could be created around inviting the rest of the staff whether now or in the future. Using a contest to virally on board staff is brilliant.

I hope you've enjoyed this journey of discovery on How to Maximize the Effectiveness of Your Staff. Modern technology can be used to solve the thorniest problems. I look forward to any feedback you have. See contact info below.



Hudson Piehl
Tipzyy | COO

Bio: Hudson has held senior roles at leading interactive companies for over 20 years and worked on several major brands including Lord of the Rings and Ghostbusters. He has extensive history with gamification, product vision, client coordination and project management for games, educational apps and consumer mobile apps.



educates and motivates, transforming your restaurant wait staff into a sales staff.

Send comments and suggestions to feedback@tipzyy.com.
For a demo of Tipzyy, contact sales@tipzyy.com.