

Building Teamwork Between Kitchen and Front of House - By Ken Burgin

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The eternal drama of friction between floor staff and kitchen. It's boring, and unnecessary...

Need to make changes in 2008? Use this page as your 'Action Agenda':

Make sure everyone understands the word 'teamwork'. Think in sporting terms - a successful team has agreed rules, a variety of skills, they chase a good score, they have good leaders, they only keep the best performers and they're always finding ways to improve.

Improve the information flow. How is a successful shift or week measured? Number of customers, per-head spend, amount of tips, complaints? A combination of 'hard' and 'soft' KPIs will measure success, and most of them need to be shared. Are results available quickly? Is POS programming accurate? The kitchen often complains they're treated like mushrooms: kept in the dark and fed you-know-what...

Include teamwork in Job Descriptions. Use the word and refer to communication skills right from the beginning. There are higher responsibilities for senior staff, who are charged with maintaining and improving a productive team climate - they are also role models for young staff and those from different cultures.

Improve the performance of meetings. They need an agenda, a person to keep everyone on track, and a leader who doesn't spend the whole time talking. More listening and more accountability - making them work takes practice. Management meetings should also be a learning time, rather than just housekeeping - print articles from this website for discussion.

Better training for floor staff. Nothing drives the kitchen crazy like a ditzzy new waiter who doesn't know the menu. Shame on you for letting them loose on customers, let alone near the kitchen. Have the kitchen actively involved, presenting short coaching sessions on menu items and answers to the curly food questions that customers ask.

New staff are treated like new friends. Introductions are made and explanations given. They're regarded as people, not numbers, and supervisors work on the critical first week to ensure no-one drops out because of nerves or misunderstanding.

Train supervisors in short, fast discipline. When someone steps out of line in a way that affects performance, it's not just overlooked. Maybe it's counselling that's needed, not harsh words. Senior staff may need coaching in how to handle minor discipline issues. Share the tips on [Managing Lazy Staff](#) or [Dealing with Jerks and Bullies](#).

Review the booking and order process. You've seen a kitchen go into paralysis as all the customers arrive at once, or servers pump in all the orders at the same time. It's not pretty, or profitable, and it doesn't have to happen if the timing is managed by experienced supervisors. Is there work needed in this area? Note this is NOT about serving fewer customers.

Technology to smooth the way. POS and hand-held terminals are mature technology, with the added bonus that handwriting is no longer an issue and order variations are standardised. It takes misunderstandings off the agenda.

Fix broken equipment. Faulty switches, ancient fryers, printers without fresh ink, insufficient tongs. Is there enough tableware, glassware and cutlery to avoid delays? Nothing drives staff crazy like a mean boss who makes their job harder. Make the repairs so you can concentrate on the important things.

Keep health and safety on the agenda. Is everyone getting the sleep they need, and keeping off the booze? Are drugs cool, or not? This is not interference, just being active with your 'Duty of Care'. A proper meal for staff gives them energy for a long shift and time to build friendships.

Winning teams cheer as well as boo! Cheering good results and winning performance, unhappy with work that lets down the side or stops others being successful. Is there enough cheering?

A smoothly working restaurant is a beautiful thing to watch as kitchen and floor staff pump out the food, the drinks and the smiles. But it's not just about 'striking it lucky' with a bunch of good people - it needs care and attention to detail. Constantly.

Profitable Hospitality offers management and cost-control systems (Manuals & CD-ROMs) for restaurants, cafes, hotels, bars and clubs. The systems are based on the extensive consulting and operating experience of CEO Ken Burgin, and enable busy owners and managers to set up complete operating and cost-control systems in minutes, not months. Profitable Hospitality also runs regular management training workshops in the areas of kitchen profit & efficiency, restaurant marketing and functions management. A free monthly e-newsletter keeps you up to date on the latest industry management issues. www.profitablehospitality.com.

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