

Food & Beverage: Creating Operational Consistency In a Nutshell - By Chris Beckler & Susan Lynn,
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The most successful restaurants are successful because they provide consistent value to their customers. It's important to create consistency, but how does one go about it? Often restaurateurs believe that creating that consistency is very difficult, but with proper training, it's very achievable.

The first step in creating consistency is to both create your company's core fundamentals, and then repeat those fundamentals. At Logan's Roadhouse, our core fundamentals include: great tasting food in a timely manner, serving hot food hot and cold food cold, clean and safe restaurant environments and great, warm, friendly service.

We use three tools to teach our team and managers daily. They are: purpose, values and brand. If you put together the communication of core fundamentals with these tools it inevitably leads to lower turnover.

In order to teach your team and managers daily every restaurant organization needs to come up with the purpose of their training department. At Logan's, purpose is: 'We are committed to training Logan's values every day. We learn, live and teach a culture and passion for 'Guest First' thinking, which will be a distinct competitive advantage and support the growth of the Logan's brand.

It's great to have your defined purpose and all the materials in line to support that purpose. What happens if you have all of your elements together and your team members and managers still aren't getting the message? You may say they have the information, why aren't they getting it? The answer may be that you need to simplify.

In order to simplify we had to create an effective Foundation Based Training Program. First we created a systematic approach to communicating purpose, values and brand. We then taught the how's and why's and a passion for 'guest first' thinking. We continually repeat top core operational necessities on a quarterly rotation, designed to ensure that we are upholding Logan's standards.

The mentality in the past was to give our managers and team members a huge list of things to accomplish. Now we have taken it to a smaller level so that it looks more doable, and we give them aids to be successful. For example, we may give managers the 'How-To's' for team member selection and make sure they get the material 2 weeks ahead of time - this allows the general manager time to prepare and delegate tasks ahead of time while developing the team.

Here's an overview of Foundation Based Training (FBT):

Purpose:

Short Term: To develop an operational training program for the company and adopt ongoing development as a core value for the business, as part of our strategic planning.

Long Term: create operational consistency and on-going development through training and repetition.

Plan Outline:

Regional Manager to teach the 13 week outline to the General Manager the first Tuesday of each Quarter

General Manager teaches to his/her team during weekly meeting

FBT Outline:

Review of Purpose and Values - Celebrate successes

FBT Focus - interactive session

Review and recap of the P&L

Review Guest Count Trends

Review team member turnover and training

Role play team member Pre-Meals

What's Up articles - written by the Regional Vice Presidents

Review Validation Book and any weekly concerns

Another way we simplified FBT was to create a Validation Book for Regional Manager. Each Validation Book is divided into three sections: Daily (which includes checklists and line checks), Weekly (the manager's meeting outline) and Quarterly (including Health Inspections, Administrative Reviews, Minimum Staffing Pars and Training Validations).

The Validation Book is designed to teach and coach. It clearly sets expectation, teaches the how and why to achieve these expectations and follow up. It validates consistency, creates accountability and follow-through and gives GMs the opportunity to redirect and coach those who fall short of expectations, thus leading to operational consistency.

Our program was, of course, not 100% at first. Too many times trainers think that if it's written down and people are trained properly, then the culture is established. But people at all levels of an organization have to be stewards of the culture. They have to hold the culture in trust and have ownership. Everyone has to be responsible for the culture of an organization moving forward.

How do you make it happen? You need to keep in touch with a variety of managers for honest feedback. You need to have roundtables that include team members. You need to visit the field, inviting yourself to manager meetings locally and out of town to get feedback on the program and see firsthand how the program is working and evaluate what the next step might be to enhance the program. You need to hold Regional Manager Meetings and include open forums. Overall, be proud of your work, listen, care, have empathy and seek solutions to opportunities.

These measures have helped us to have synergy with our organization on all levels from the front of the house to the back of the house, from Risk Management to Marketing. Working together has had outstanding results. We have continued to lower management turnover, we have had 19 consecutive quarters with flat or positive SSS growth, morale is great and we have a useful tool that will enable us to continue to grow.

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