

Foodservice Updates

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Refocus on retention

Much like it's easier and less expensive for restaurants to retain existing customers than attract new ones, operators are in a much stronger position if they can retain and develop their existing staff – not have to constantly look for new people. A study from the Center for Hospitality Research at Cornell University found that the average cost of employee turnover is nearly \$5,900 per person – funds that could go a lot farther in developing the kinds of resources that would encourage existing staff to stay on. According to a Restaurant Dive report about commentary shared during a panel of labor experts at the recent Restaurant Finance & Development Conference, restaurants need retention and development strategies that work at scale. Getting new employees to stay past the 90-day mark is especially important because these employees account for 12-15 percent of labor costs at casual restaurants and 22 percent of labor costs at limited-service restaurants, said panelist Luke Fryer, CEO of hospitality workforce management firm Harri. You can best identify your pain points – and improve upon them – by mapping out the average growth cycle of employees. At each stage of the employee journey, what are their biggest concerns? How might you address them with tech, tools, training or development opportunities? You also want to be able to identify your best talent early so you can provide what's needed to retain those people. That means having frequent check-ins to see how things are going – and so they see that you want them to succeed.



Tech Talk

Delivery 2.0

If you've been struggling to find a way to make delivery efficient and cost-effective, drone delivery is gradually and steadily gaining ground as an additional means of getting food to customers fast. Futuristic as it may still seem, a number of restaurant brands have been testing and launching the technology in limited areas. Nation's Restaurant News reported that a Chick-fil-A in Austin, Texas is the latest among other Chick-fil-A stores to test the technology, and other brands include Jersey Mike's, Freddy's and Sweetgreen. At the Austin Chick-fil-A, the operators said the test of drone delivery was done to cut delivery costs and provide consistency. While the radius of the drone delivery is still small at under two miles, the response has been positive, with one customer saying their food arrived "super fast" and was "hot, perfect."



Don't let tech water down your service culture



The influx of guest-facing tech tools can make it feel like restaurant staff have fewer opportunities to interact with guests and provide the kind of experience that brings them back. But these tools are meant to be resources to help them do a better job – not crutches to help them avoid the work. So if you're using these guest-facing tech tools and they are lightening the load of your staff in various ways, be on the lookout for the people on your team who are finding ways to go out of their way to provide a great guest experience in other ways. Maybe that comes through in how they greet guests arriving or thanking regulars by name on the way out. Maybe it's taking time to talk with guests and take care of extra requests when delivering their orders. Adopting these tech tools will call for developing staff differently – and for looking for new methods of delivering the service your guests expect from you.

Trends

More consumers are eating their holiday meals at restaurants

Times are changing. While Thanksgiving was once a quintessential home-based holiday, many more consumers stepped out to restaurants for their meal this year. Restaurant Business found that the percentage of consumers who planned to eat their Thanksgiving meal in a restaurant this year was double what it was last year. So project this forward to the holidays to come. As your restaurant plans for the festive season, experiences will continue to be important – and there may be an opportunity for you to provide high-value dining experiences for your guests. Restaurant bookings are showing that there is an appetite for it. Plus, at a time when convenience is so important to consumers, helping them avoid spending a day in the kitchen preparing food for holiday meals could hold strong appeal.



Help your team brush up on handling animal proteins safely

'Tis the season for heavier meals – and for many people, holiday celebrations involve having a ham, roast, turkey or other animal protein at the center of the table. If you're offering proteins that you don't normally feature on the menu, it's a good time to talk with your kitchen team to review how to store these items safely during refrigeration, how to handle them safely during preparation, and steps to take to avoid cross-contamination of ingredients. You might also review the internal temperatures that various proteins need to reach for safe consumption, as well as how long various proteins can be left out before entering the temperature danger zone.



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Serving alcohol safely this season

The festivity and stress of the holiday season can result in greater consumption of alcohol by your guests – even among those who normally abstain. It may be helpful to review your state’s alcohol liability with your staff. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 30 states have laws allowing restaurants, bars, and other businesses to be held liable for selling or serving alcohol to people who cause injury or death because of their intoxication. It’s important to have your staff check IDs and to train workers about how to respond when customers are clearly intoxicated.



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The opportunity in your inventory

The holiday rush can put extra strain on your inventory – you want to have the items your guests crave, yet there is also more risk of wastage if you don't have systems in place to manage your inventory carefully. Operators who have those systems in place, however, can unearth some hidden funds and put them to good use. Restaurants spend between 20 and 40 percent of their revenue on food, according to research from TouchBistro, so there is a lot of potential for saving money (as well as overspending). If you need to bring more rigor to your inventory management practices, a recent report from The Rail provides some guidance. First, you need to create a regular schedule for taking inventory and assign a senior staff member to the task. Place your ingredients into categories and organize your stock to reflect it so items are easy to find during prep and it's more obvious when items are missing or low. Operate a lean inventory with enough stock to meet guest demand and no more. Track the waste that doesn't end up in a guest's dish so you can identify waste patterns and also find potential uses for these leftover ingredients – it helps to use software to precisely measure each recipe's ingredients. Designate a single person to handle deliveries coming into the restaurant – it can help you maintain a better ordering structure and improve your inventory accuracy. Finally, connect your inventory management system with your POS. As the nerve center of your business, it will help you better anticipate factors that can impact your ordering schedule and key ingredients.



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