

Foodservice Updates

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Be ready for labor pool's shifting dynamics

In September, the restaurant industry added 60,000 jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. While the industry is still 4.5 percent below pre-pandemic staffing levels, the data represent a healthy jump in employment for a sector hit hard by the pandemic. While the majority of operators expect economic conditions to deteriorate in the coming months, according to a National Restaurant Association survey, such an environment may shift the dynamics of the labor market, bringing a fresh infusion of people looking for employment and a continued uptick in hiring. For restaurants, this represents an opportunity to attract and retain talent – but doing so relies on having the kind of culture in which staff can thrive. In a recent podcast, Brant Menswar, an author and speaker who helps organizations navigate change and improve culture, shared several components of high-performing cultures. He said top cultures offer connection – a sense of purpose, belonging and partnership with others toward reaching a common goal. They provide safe spaces where people can contribute without fear of ridicule and be their authentic selves. These cultures offer opportunities for personal growth – and that could be through professional opportunities and responsibilities and/or opportunities for personal improvement. Finally, employees need to be given the freedom and authority to make decisions and find creative solutions to problems. If and when the dynamics of the labor force shift, will your restaurant provide the kind of culture in which people can thrive?



How much time do you spend on tasks that can be outsourced to tech?

SpotOn, the restaurant software and payments company, recently announced in its State of Restaurant Tech Report that the top challenges operators are facing in the next six months are rising costs, operational complexity and labor management – all challenges that consume many hours of an operator’s time. Labor management alone, according to the report, takes up more than 16 hours of a manager’s time each week. The time spent can be deceiving: An individual task like verifying staff clock-in may not take up much time on its own, but the hours add up. When you consider your top challenges in the coming months, do you know how much time you’re spending on what? Assess your biggest time eaters – and understand how much each task takes relative to others. There may be an easy tech-driven fix that can help you remove some of the burden from your staff and allow you to focus more time on tasks that drive business and cut costs.



Mobile digital support for smaller independents

As consumers have used digital channels more frequently to order restaurant food in recent years, many independent restaurants have been lagging with the mobile tech needed to facilitate those transactions. According to the June edition of the Digital Divide study, which included data from a PYMNTS survey of approximately 2,400 adults who regularly purchase food from restaurants, 56 percent of chain restaurants offer mobile order-ahead capabilities, compared with only 31 percent of independents. Low-cost tools to help eliminate the snags from the ordering process will become increasingly important. Fortunately, some companies are focusing on supporting independent restaurants’ tech transition to help level the playing field. ItsaCheckmate, for one, recently announced it would be launching an integration for small and medium-sized businesses that would enable direct ordering through Google’s search and maps functions.





Spicy fried pickle planks

Ingredients:

- 8 fl oz All purpose flour
- 2 tbsp Cornstarch
- 8 fl oz Panko breadcrumbs
- 4 fl oz American bread crumbs
- 1 Egg
- 8 fl oz Water
- 7 Pickle planks julienned
- 1 tsp Creole seasoning
- 2 fl oz Boom Boom Sauce
- 2 fl oz Jalapeño Ranch Dressing

Simple ingredients can step it up

In recent months, you've likely had to adapt to an ever-shifting array of ingredients. Your favorite brands or even broad categories of items may be inaccessible due to escalating prices and supply chain problems. So what can you do to maximize what you do have? Channel the creativity you would lend to the finishing touches of a dish and consider the potential of your pantry. What simple, readily available ingredients can you transform with different preparation methods into something exciting, unexpected and different from what your guests are apt to prepare for themselves at home?

Food Trends



Instructions:

1. Mix flour and cornstarch, place in square pan. Mix panko and breadcrumbs, place in square pan. Mix water and egg in mixing bowl.
2. Set up breading station: flour – eggwash – bread-crumbs, in that order.
3. Dredge pickle planks one at a time in flour, then eggwash, then bread crumbs, coating evenly all over. Place on sheet pan lined with paper cover and refrigerate until service.
4. Preheat fryer to 365°F. Place pickle planks in basket and fry until golden brown – approximately 3 minutes. Drain and sprinkle evenly with Creole seasoning.
5. Serve with Boom Boom Sauce and Jalapeño Ranch Dressing for dipping sauces.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Ken's

Safe poultry prep

As Thanksgiving and the holiday season approach – and consumption of turkey and other poultry climbs – give your team a primer on safe preparation. Salmonella is among the top causes of food poisoning in the U.S., leading to about 26,500 hospitalisations and 420 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Chicken and turkey are responsible for about 20 percent of Salmonella infections, the most of any food category. As you anticipate serving up this season’s poultry, remember to separate poultry from raw and ready-to-eat foods. Thaw poultry safely – not out on the counter – and avoid keeping it at room temperature for more than two hours. Wash hands thoroughly and disinfect surfaces nearby, but don’t wash the poultry itself – it spreads bacteria around the sink and nearby surfaces. If you need to remove anything from the skin, use a paper towel to do so. Cook to 165°F, as measured with the thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh.



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Make tough decisions to protect safety

As you prepare for an uptick in traffic over the holiday season, you're likely stretching your imagination with new menu items and promotions that will make the occasion feel special. At a time when labor will continue to be uncertain, ensure that your food safety standards aren't stretched to accommodate your plans. Consider slimming down various parts of your operation – to include your menu and aspects of your service model – to either eliminate or bring greater efficiency to your most labor-intensive tasks. Scrutinize each menu item to make sure you're maximizing profit, minimizing the labor hours required to prepare and serve it, and opting for the plan that you're best able to execute with minimal staff. It may require you to forgo offerings that have been popular in the past, but preserving food safety even if you have a skeleton crew can help you ensure the experience you're providing is one of quality.



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The limits of plant-based protein

Last year, 62 percent of U.S. households (or 79 million) bought plant-based products, up from 61 percent (or 77 million) in 2020, according to the Plant-Based Food Institute. Further, the percentage of consumers purchasing multiple times within the plant-based category grew from 78 percent to 79 percent in the same time frame. The increasing cost of meat, as well as growing consumer awareness of its environmental impacts, were driving the charge toward plant-based alternatives both at home and in restaurants. Now, some nuances are emerging about consumer demand for plant-based meat that may alter the landscape for the restaurant operators serving it. In short, it may not be the draw for flexitarians that it once was. New research from Deloitte found that the appeal of plant-based meat may have reached a saturation point. The research found a decline in the percentage of consumers willing to pay a premium for plant-based meat as opposed to conventional varieties, as well a decline in the attitudes of consumers toward plant-based meat's sustainability and assumed health benefits. As you consider what to put on the menu, foods that are plant-based (both naturally so and not) are still likely to continue to be a draw. Just anticipate that your guests may scrutinize the plant-based meat on your menu – and may draw a line on costs that's well below what it would be for the alternative.



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