

CUTTING EDGE *Culinary Task Force Contribution July/August*

Invest in Employee Foodservice Skills

.....Navigating a path to develop your kitchen crew

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Today you are constantly tasked to do more with less. You might have the same food purchasing budget as two years ago. You may have not seen a budget increase allowing you to add another member to the team or to pass on the much deserved staff raise. You might still be unable to replace those **out dated** pieces of equipment. Regardless of the short coming, we all know the show must and will of course go on. These slippery slopes land back into your lap deeming that you are the lucky one to work through the situations.

As you read about ways to develop your kitchen staff, a couple of the possibilities from above will be able to be addressed. As your employees are able to become more skilled through opportunities being offered by your department and organization, it becomes easier to operate under tight purchasing dollars. This is because employees will grow to understand maximum and creative utilization of products. In addition, the staff will be more refined in their skillsets ultimately lending to greater productivity. Another key point to investing in your employees is that the investment is directly related to employee retention.

When an employee feels more valued by the organization and that they are growing in their position, it is more likely they will stay. Feeling valued coupled with belonging to a positive work culture results in employees who are less likely to seek new opportunities. If there is less turnover in your department there will be less money spent on recruitment and retention. All things being equal, these surplus dollars could then be allocated to operational needs. This approach might require some tracking, data collection, negotiation and meeting with the HR manager. However, if you understand how your efforts affect the big picture then you are better equipped to state and defend your case.

Determining the training needs of your operation

Granted we can tap into different types of training through various resources. These resources will be explored later in *Where are the Opportunities?* So where do you start

in determining what trainings to provide. Understanding this might be new to you and your team, you will want to ensure that the concept is relevant to everyone's needs. In doing so, the process will help to ensure that you will create the necessary buy-in.

- Conduct an overall 360 degree assessment of your team. Interviews or questionnaires will work to compile this information.
 - What are your employee's present skills and where would you like them to be?
 - Determine their interest and motivation for developing their skill sets
 - Importantly, what is their aptitude for kitchen work? We all know the kitchen is a place for some and not for others
- Learn what your customer (I will use customer throughout to refer to residents, patients, etc.) likes and dislikes related to your operation. Gaining their perspective will help to bring the training full circle. Depending on your audience I would suggest interviews, round table discussion or a meeting. Questionnaires may or may not be best for the audience.
 - Are they satisfied with the menu and selections, the quality, the temperatures, the customer service, the hours, the dining atmosphere, etc.
 - The more you know about your customer the better you can serve their needs.
- A meeting with your administrator/director will be an appropriate conversation for a couple reasons
 - It will inform them of your intentions to implement a training/development program.
 - You will be able to gain their present feel on your operation as well as expectations for the future.
 - They might have some ideas for an incentive or rewards program that will be touched upon in *Promoting the Opportunities...*

After conducting your fact finding missions in the three areas you should have a pretty fair assessment of the needs, thus the areas of training which to develop.

- I suggest assembling a list of 5-10 items for each of the three areas
- Cross reference for topics creating a list of 6-10 common topics or as many as you can. There are likely standouts topics that appear on two or all three lists.

- Next, assemble two lists, a first and second priority, of 3-5 topics. Do your best to ensure that each list contains a topic item from each group. This helps with inclusion and buy-in.
- These two lists will provide you with two different “programs” that can be offered to your team members. We will talk about additional benefits of the program later in *Promoting the Opportunities...*

By including ALL of the stake holders in the creation of this endeavor you will gain a degree of buy-in from those who will ultimately be *affected* by the approach. I use the term *affected* due to a likely expenditure of money, time and dedication that it takes on behalf of administration, management and staff to see this into action. I also use *affected* in a positive manner as there will be benefits to be recognized as a result of the better trained staff. Some results that you might recognize in your department are happier staff, more of a team atmosphere and less employee turnover. Customers might recognize better meal quality, different menu selections, and more accommodating staff. As a result of these positive effects, the doctor’s reports could also likely improve. If people are eating more of the meal it stands to reason that this will help to result in healthier customers. If some of the positive results mentioned are occurring, your supervisor will likely be pleased with your efforts.

How can you present the trainings to your team?

Now that you have the pot at a simmer you need to find some resources in order to begin to prep for making the different flavors of soup that you signed on to deliver. Here are some of the many places to resource for your development opportunities.

- **ANFP meetings** – you all know that there is an increasing focus on food knowledge and skill development within the ANFP. This is evidenced by the creating of the Culinary Task Force as well as the educational programming at the upcoming NLC. You can also feature these activities at your local and state events
- **ACF chapter collaborations** – reach out to your local ACF chefs chapter for meetings and professional development workshops, seminars, etc.
- **In-house workshops** – conduct your own food service trainings as a part of in-service training and professional development
- **Vendor/supplier trainings or demonstrations**– your food distributor is typically happy to come into your operation to show new or industry appropriate products for you and your staff. This will typically serve as both culinary and professional development

- **Product/manufacturer webinars** – many manufacturers provide webinars that offer education as well as CE toward certification
- **Demonstrations** – you can tap into local talent to provide a demo during a meeting, between services times or as a social activity for your team
- **Courses at local schools through professional development or tuition assistance** – most post-secondary schools offer courses for community/professional development, many times your employer will offer tuition assistance for course work from accredited institutions
- **Personalized in-house training** – as a way of maximizing training dollars you can contract with outside trainers to develop and deliver a program that is suited to your specific needs
- **One's own learning can be brought back to enrich your crew** – a message I always interject is that as you or your staff are participating in forms of professional development the need, which should be a requirement, is there to pass on the subject matter learned during the educational opportunity on to the entire team. This will help to recognize a better overall value from the investment. This will also ensure that the trip is taken seriously and not just as a vacation. It also serves as a form of development for the employee to talk about what they learned

Promoting the opportunities from within

While working to create a richer team dynamic by providing educational opportunities there are typically hurdles.

- Where does the time come from? Who will give the time?
- Will the employees participate the program? How are they motivated?
- What is the value for both employer and employee? What is the pay-off?

Hopefully there is a mutually beneficial agreement that can be reached that will provide the employee with compensation while not requiring the employer to foot the whole bill. For instance, for every two hours of a workshop they are compensated for one hour. Other options is to pay a flat rate or a different hourly training wage for the workshops. Obviously HR and employee relations will play a role in how the plan can be rolled out. By applying this approach both sides have an investment in the training thus increasing the value for both parties. This will help the employees' motivation to embrace program.

Additional points to help promote the program are certificates of completion, recognition within a monthly newsletter and/or becoming a facet of the employee of the month/quarter program. These “shout-outs” show appreciation, increase morale and pass a positive message to the entire team. As employees complete an entire development program this a great opportunity for a greater recognition of accomplishment and success. One way to make this a bigger deal is to award this accolade during an annual holiday recognition dinner or holiday party. Always keeping in perspective that everyone likes to be recognized. When an employee does something to warrant recognition for be sure to pass on the gratitude.

I trust that this has shed some light on utilizing the resources around you in an effort to develop your food service team. Be calculated in your approach and remember to promote the buy-in from all levels. As you move this forward, you will begin to reap the benefits of the hard work invested into the program, the employees and the department. Remember the benefits ultimately land with the customer. They will be the biggest recipient of the efforts put forward by everyone in the effort to improve the foodservice operation. Let me know about your successes. I will enjoy hearing from you as your training program develops.