



by Craig Pendleton

## Creating a Culture of Change

Over time, operators can find themselves in a position where they have created standard operating practices for almost all business functions. In the beginning, during the chaos of new openings and large volumes of business, this represented standardization and consistent control. Often success and repeating the same successful behaviors can create a trap where change within a business becomes very difficult.

Ideas may be stifled when it takes many meetings and approvals to make changes. Something as simple as a menu change or pricing changes may require multiple tastings and multiple meetings. When a business begins to operate this way fewer changes occur due to the cumbersome and slow process. Eventually the staff and supervision get used to this and any change, even for the best of reasons, meets strong resistance. Once the staff and leadership become comfortable with strict systems and processes in place, without mandating dynamic business practices, the problem continues to compound.

In fact most people, especially customers, like change. The fact that things are different when guests/players visit a casino is a point of interest and avoids stagnation. It creates excitement when a guest/player never knows what will be new each time they visit. It creates an opportunity for marketing and promotion. Some of the greatest innovators within the gaming industry are constantly looking for opportunities to change and evolve. They operate in a constant state of dynamic change.

Guests visit their properties expecting something new to be occurring. These operators are constantly remodeling something, adjusting promotions and offering something new. This process of change becomes their business model and in fact is missed by their customers if change stops occurring.

### Where Does Change Come From?

- Empowering staff members and supervision to listen to guests.
- Trying new ideas for the actual process and practice of becoming something new and not stale.
- Copying and adapting the best ideas created and used by others in the industry. Not merely copying but adapting these ideas to make them fit the specific casino and guests.
- Never stop evolving, changing, adjusting, remodeling and creating a reason for customers to come to the casino as well as providing validation of the guest's requests and involvement.

### Obstacles

- An environment that discourages change or creates the stigma of change as evil or not desired. The tone of the culture and environment is set by ownership and senior management.
- A culture created by upper management that encourages staff to blindly follow current process and procedures without question.
- Many staff members resist change simply because it presents a different and less comfortable daily process even if the changes make work easier. Some people will always be suspicious of change. Understand that if a business does not currently practice constant change, as a part of daily operations and culture, it will take time to shift the culture to change.

### Successful Practices

- Be encouraging.
- A change in culture must be lead from the ownership and senior management that encourages thinking and suggestions.
- Give employees room to create change, have their own voice and be a part of the process.
- Minimize roadblocks and levels of approval. Address and adjust trust by ownership as needed. Reduce parameters of approval to a maximum of two layers for all areas except legal and large expenditures over a certain threshold.
- Create systems that allow the ability to change processes and turn quickly "on a dime."
- Change needs to be "regular business" for staff and customers.
- Change is required to be constant and deliberate while also being measurable allowing feedback and return on investment of efforts.
- Constantly communicate with staff and guests. Explain the changes, get everyone on board – good surprises, not bad surprises.
- Property wide involvement required for changes and trials – eliminate "stay in your own lane" thinking. Rarely can a change occur without affecting all departments and guests.

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- Be flexible and encourage adaptation. What works in one area or department can often be adjusted and work well in another. What works well in other industries can often be adjusted to work well in your casino.
- Everything should be “our ideas,” not “your ideas.” Win or fail together with input and planning by all parties.
- Copy and adapt industry leaders and great ideas.
- Dedicate time every week for brainstorming, determining next changes and trials.
- No independent agendas. Change must fit the entire casino.
- For every change planned discuss and develop “what ifs” and “Plan B.” This is not micromanagement. This is training and preparation for the staff. It creates thinking and often creates opportunity for

fine tuning prior to changes.

- Provide the resources required for the change to occur, this might be staffing, training, equipment or other items. Set yourself and your staff up for success.
- Celebrate and recognize great ideas and work.
- Celebrate great efforts even in failure.
- Never settle – yearn to get better and grow. Create a culture of “passion for change.”

Constant change + adaptation = evolution of self and business, often survival above the competition and good business. ♣

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