



Fully Training Your Food and Beverage Staff While Reducing Turnover

by Craig Pendleton

Undertrained food and beverage staff and high turnover are common occurrences within the casino industry. This lack of process and investment is confusing at best. This department enjoys some of the longest periods of interaction with players; longer than many other departments. Valet, security, front desk, slot attendants may interact with the players for brief moments, while the food and beverage staff may be engaged with casino guests for up to two hours during a visit.

In addition to this extended period of interaction, an added aspect of food and beverage is turning around a customer's often disheartening experience of losing money at the casino and still have the player leave happy to return, rather than visit a competitor the next time they head for a casino.

Common Issues

Food and beverage is most commonly involved in the service element of the player experience rather than the profit generation process. Whether programmed to lose money or through actual operations, food and beverage outlets often lose money or break even. This is not necessarily a bad thing given the premise that gaming delivers a greater return on investment than food and beverage. Food and beverage operators outside of casinos understand that the margins in this industry are meager due to competition and costs involved. *Result: Departments that lose money rather than earn money are typically given less training funds and training emphasis.*

Food and beverage is complicated. This is one of the few departments within the casino that is tasked with manufacturing, service, marketing and sales. Each of these elements is complicated to perform separately, let alone together. Failure in any one of these areas can lead to lack of profitability and guest satisfaction. *Result: Frequent failure to produce profit and high level of staffing along with a high level of overhead and guest dissatisfaction.*

Food and beverage outlets are often not the first choice among casino employment candidates. This area is viewed as hard work without glamorous conditions. Candidates often apply for positions that have the same pay rate in areas that they believe are easier to perform. *Result: Some of the best candidates work in other departments and there is typically a list of existing food and beverage employees with transfer requests in human resources waiting to move to other departments.*

Staff hired in the food and beverage department may not have an aptitude or desire to study and train in a classroom environment. Many employees in this department have no desire for a "desk type job." They enjoy movement, interaction and production. *Result: New and existing food and beverage employees may have a different training aptitude than other departments and must have a specific system for training and ongoing development tailored to this department. Many properties attempt to use a "one-size-fits-all" approach to training, leaving food and beverage staff members largely undertrained and in some cases estranged from the process.*

Promotions in food and beverage department areas often are based upon work performance, not the ability to lead, supervise, administrate and train other staff members. Examples would be the strongest cook who is promoted to shift leader or the best food server who is promoted to a dining room supervisor. *Result: Middle level supervisors within the food and beverage department may not be well fitted for their positions or have a system of development for themselves.*

Turnover within the department is frequent leading to less time, emphasis and expense applied to the staff members as it appears that there is a low return on investment from this training. *Result: This problem escalates as the turnover rate increases and destabilizes the department leading to a situation where much of the staff is new.*

The food and beverage staff members don't have a clear understanding of the department mission within the casino. This may also apply to food and beverage supervision. *Result: Without a clear mission and understanding of the role of casino food and beverage, the department is often run similar to free-standing independent non-casino restaurants.*

Training materials are outdated or don't exist. Training process and testing is unclear and inconsistent. *Result: Without proper materials employees may be given a copy of old materials, a menu and told to follow another employee to figure out their job. Often the employee they are assigned to follow is undertrained and will teach improper process and behaviors to the new staff member. This leads to inconsistent results and frustration of staff along with staff members that have large gaps in training often increasing turnover.*

Human resources does not have any staff members who are familiar or proficient in food and beverage operations that allow them to assist in the creation of department specific materials and the integration of these into the next steps training after general employee orientation. *Result: There is not a seamless transition of training for the staff member and a lack of ongoing training materials development support from HR to the department.*

It is not hard to understand that given these challenges staffing inconsistencies and high turnover can result within the food and beverage department.

Solutions

The food and beverage department must have a clear vision of the department position within the casino and its mission. The role of the department, its elements and the staff member must be clear.

Food and beverage training must be provided an appropriate level of resources needed to complete training in consideration of the complicated nature of this department

Upper casino management needs to provide the direction and position that food and beverage is a critical element of the player guest service experience and elevate the department's resources to a level that will provide consistent results while increasing the guest experience provided.

Food and beverage department and position specific training materials must exist or be created.

- Materials for each position should be tailored to the aptitude of the specific new staff member that typically fills the position.
- Special attention should be given to the optimum balance of classroom and hands on training time as well as the trainee's ability to read and write.
- Training timetables, checklists and formats should be created.
- Every element of training should be presented in an order that makes sense.
- There should be daily training goals, testing, verification of completion and understanding of materials.
- Each trainee should be assigned a personal trainer to work with every day to insure understanding and an appropriate speed of training. Often training fails when this is not addressed.

- Supervisor development materials should be created to train and support supervisors and shift leads to assist in their optimum performance and job satisfaction.

The human resources department needs a designated staff member familiar with food and beverage operations to partner with the department in both the areas of recruiting and training materials creation. Without a thorough understanding of what it takes to perform each position the wrong employees get passed through to the department. Success of any department begins with great hiring. Training materials should be customized for each position with the support of human resources to insure that these materials are compatible with casino-wide training and support is given the department when creating video and classroom based materials.

Provide a documented list of performance expectations along with specific measureable standards. Provide constant feedback of results and coaching. When staff members have a clear set of job specific goals, are assessed frequently and provided with timely feedback along with corrective coaching they can succeed and continue to develop.

Constantly train on weekly standards and new goals to continue development, address current business challenges and provide ongoing communication with staff members. Constant new weekly training and goals provide long term results.

Supervisor promotions must be based upon supervision abilities and aptitudes rather than job skills. Often the best staff employee at a position is not the best candidate as a supervisor. Often the best supervisor is not the best trainer. A system of qualification and measurement must be created to assess and develop supervisors and all supervisor candidates. Failure to have such a system can lead to poor management and turnover by frustrated employees who would have been best left in their current position and not promoted to a position that they are ill fitted for and where they are unsuccessful.

The food and beverage department is a critical element of the casino player experience and amenity programs. Only through an efficient system of training and development will the department succeed in this goal of great player experience, attraction and frequency of repeat visits while reducing staff turnover. ♣

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