

# small adjustments, BIG IMPACT

CULINARY CONNECTION



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In today's kitchens there are hundreds—if not thousands—of variables that affect our operational efficiency, productivity, and feasibility. Those in management, and employees with management mindsets, understand the basic variables.

Labor, for instance, is something we all closely monitor and meticulously schedule to maximize the dollar amount spent for production during those hours. There are inventory controls that are consistently fluid in terms of on-hand, use, waste, etc. on a daily basis. Outside of operational issues, we also have the constant demand of sanitation and safety, and all the required SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)

that come with it including endless documentation and corrective actions. As if all this isn't enough, our clients' demands, requests, concerns, and even complaints get thrust to the top of our to-do list, often at the most inopportune times. We typically just chalk it up to "It's all in a day's work."

I've found, however, that across the industry there are some organizations (and more specifically departments within organizations) that outperform the others. In exploring why and how these departments stand out, I've compiled a list of small adjustments that I've seen make a seriously BIG impact. The good news is these

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**Rocky Dunnam, CEC, CDM, CFPP** is Executive Chef at the Bivins Foundation, Childers Place, Bivins Memorial Nursing Home, Elizabeth Jane Bivins Culinary Center, NINETEEN49 Catering, and Rock'D Recipes in Amarillo, Texas.

 [rocky.dunnam@ejbcc.org](mailto:rocky.dunnam@ejbcc.org)

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minor adjustments can be implemented on any scale, at any time, and on literally any budget.

### LABOR

The continuous struggle with labor lies in the ability to effectively balance a budgeted dollar value with the necessary time in which work is to be done. Seems like a simple equation until you factor in a myriad of variables including differing salaries, dependability of staff in numerous roles, and balancing hours between salaried, hourly, full-time, part-time, and PRN employees. With all these variables, how can you possibly maintain any sense of consistency?

The labor quandary is one that affects everyone regardless of staff size,

facility needs, or even budget depth. Here are two basic practices that I've seen several times in management of labor that can be adopted to achieve a positive outcome.

### Cross Training

The most effective employees make up the most efficient workforce, resulting in feasible labor numbers. The easiest way to develop effective staff is to cross-train everyone in one or more additional job functions. This may not mean training your janitor to complete administrative checks, but it could easily include training that janitor to wash dishes or even prepare refreshment carts. On countless occasions I've witnessed the effective fulfillment of a role simply

because an employee who's currently "on the clock" knows how to perform the additional task. Bonus: this actually saves you labor dollars on occasion when you can temporarily accomplish the same tasks with less staff.

### Shift Games

Consider playing a friendly game during the shift to enhance morale and add a little fun. Patrick Lencioni notes in his book, *The Truth About Employee Engagement*, that staff members want to feel like who they are matters, that they are making an impact, and that they are making progress. (More on this in the Staff Morale section.) If his statement is accurate—

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and I believe it is—then shift games are a great way to achieve all three of his noted engagement necessities. Discuss the idea with your staff and begin to develop “games” that meet goals, timelines, etc. when played.

One that I’ve seen is Prep Time Trials, where the prep staff splits tasks evenly and then races to complete them with no mistakes. This game creates an unbelievable time efficiency, leaving the prep staff with time to cross-train as cooks. Consider letting the winner leave early but still be paid for the extra hour they saved themselves, or maybe the competition lasts a week and the winner writes their own schedule next week.

## INVENTORY

The discussion of inventory focuses on a few factors that are so fluid that they often move significantly even within one day. On-hand inventory changes constantly, usage is a daily adjustment, waste is a perplexing variable, and then ordering/procurement must be adjusted based on all factors included. Wow. What small adjustments can be made here that will provide a much-needed big impact?

## Family Meal/Shift Meal

This is a time when you and your staff can enjoy a meal (or snack) together, discuss the day and brainstorm in a relaxing, non-intimidating environment. The daily “family” meal serves several functions, but it’s based on one simple rule—this meal must only utilize items that might otherwise be wasted. Staff must understand the inventory and how it relates to the menu, and seek out opportunities to utilize extra inventory or overproduction. For example, you may have bananas that are browning and soft. If you don’t need them for your menu, your staff may decide that using them to make banana bread for the family meal is appropriate. This approach applies to all produce with a short or moderate shelf life. It also applies to “extra” items, like the 6 pounds of chicken wings remaining after the 14 pounds required for production are used from a 20 pound case. This initiative forces your staff to get creative, become waste conscious, and maybe even discover a new menu item that can save you some money. Loop your supervisor in on the idea of a “family” meal for your staff, and stress that additional food won’t be purchased for use in this team-building and bonding



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experience.

## SANITATION AND FOOD SAFETY

We can all agree that food safety and sanitation are unrivaled in importance to any other aspect of our industry. At the same time, it’s one area that becomes so mundane that minute (yet significant) details often get overlooked. There’s no real “fun” way to get staff to increase their sanitation

proress, but there is a way to ensure that it’s effectively managed.

## The Buddy System

Oftentimes the “buddy system” increases retention and accountability in areas of life where we need it most. If your friend wants to quit smoking, they may ask you to hold them accountable. If your spouse wants to lose weight, he

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or she may request that you stop buying cookies or ice cream to eliminate the temptation. Well this same idea applies to sanitation practices in the workplace. At the beginning of the day or shift, pair up your staff with a buddy. This buddy is responsible for checking the other person's sanitation prowess throughout the shift. One buddy may remember to change sanitizer buckets, and the other buddy may notice a spot on the floor you missed when sweeping. The point is, when one buddy misses it, the other probably won't. We all win when we have someone keeping us accountable, and when we hold someone else accountable for their actions. It's important to keep the buddy system a friendly and helpful experience for employees.

### STAFF MORALE

As previously mentioned, staff engagement is crucial. Staff engagement on a continual basis is a benchmark indicator of employee morale (or the satisfaction, outlook, and sense of well-being an employee has in a work setting). You can make many small adjustments to create a big impact on employee morale. Here are just two.

### Celebrate Employees

Celebrate accomplishments within work, and in their personal lives. Milestones like employee work anniversaries, times when staff members go above and beyond, etc. should be recognized immediately, but also recognizing employee-specific life events like birthdays, engagements, a grandchild's birth, etc. will promote a caring and positive environment. All this takes is a small dry-erase board in a public location (like by the time clock) on which you can write notes, accomplishments, and positive reinforcement. Maybe even consider writing the list of winners in the Shift Games from yesterday or last week.

### Say "Good Morning!"

The Scandinavians, who are known as being some of the happiest people on earth, refer to this concept as *arbejdsglaede*. In America, we translate it as "happiness at work." We spend roughly one-third of our waking lives at work, so it's safe to say that the happier we are on the job, the happier we are in life. According to Aristotle "We are what we repeatedly do..." so we can be happy by repeatedly being happy! This all starts with our first interactions of the day. This



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week, consciously begin each day by greeting every person on your staff with a sincere "Good Morning," or "Buenos Dias," or "Oh Hey!" as appropriate to convey a positive, energetic, and happy mindset. In just one week you'll begin to see significant improvement in morale!

### SUMMING IT UP

Every good leader is engaged in a process of continual development. There are too many leadership/self-help books to count with different formulas to achieve

success, and I've read several hundred of them personally so I won't say they don't work or don't inspire in their own way. However, after working with a multitude of operators over the years in various environments, I can confidently say that the most effective impact comes from the small-scale strategies presented here. Look for ways to implement simple practices that pay big dividends in your food service. **E**

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## CE Questions: Culinary Connection



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1. What is one variable that affects all of our operations?
  - A. Weather
  - B. pH levels in water
  - C. Labor
2. What does SOP stand for?
  - A. Standard Operating Procedure
  - B. Size Over Preparation
  - C. Security On Premises
3. What is a good way to maximize labor efficiency?
  - A. Do all the work yourself
  - B. Cross-train employees
  - C. Buy convenience items
4. Who wrote *The Truth About Employee Engagement*?
  - A. Malcolm Gladwell
  - B. Wolfgang Puck
  - C. Patrick Lencioni
5. What is *not* a benefit of "family" meals?
  - A. Reduces/uses waste
  - B. Builds teamwork
  - C. Allows us to bring our kids to work
6. If we only use 14 lbs. of chicken from a 20 lb. case, what can we do with the remaining 6 lbs.?
  - A. Host a "family" meal for employees
  - B. Serve larger portions to men
  - C. Take it home
7. What is one way to increase staff morale?
  - A. Terminate the "bad apples"
  - B. Quit and go to a different company
  - C. Celebrate employees

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