



Commercial Kitchen Innovations: Staffing

CULINARY CONNECTION



LOOK AT YOUR KITCHEN STAFF THROUGH THE
LENS OF CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION.

The term *innovation* means a new method, idea, product, etc. or the action or process of innovating. Synonyms include words like *change* and *transform*. When we begin to discuss innovation in commercial kitchens, every hospitality professional thinks first of products (ingredients, convenience items, etc.) or equipment (combi-ovens, sous vide immersion circulators, other appliances). But I propose something entirely new... something truly INNOVATIVE. Let's begin to look at our *staff* through the lens of change and transformation.

If you've been in this industry long enough, you know well the obstacles of staffing commercial kitchens. Most hospitality payrolls see an annual turnover rate of around

71 percent, according to a recent National Restaurant News report. It's a staggering thought: 7-out-of-10 employees you hire won't stay even one year. Yet few operators devote much thought to how to prevent this phenomenon when there are many other fires to put out on a daily basis. Do we even want to worry about it? I believe in a simple Cause and Effect mentality when it comes to staffing.

STAFFING CHALLENGES

There are four main legs to this table that we call staffing. Any one of them can cause employees to leave a position.

1. **Boss/Subordinate Relationships.** The number one reason people quit their job is because of the relationship they have with the boss...not the job



Rocky Dunnam, CEC, CDM, CFPP is the Executive Chef for the Bivins Foundation, Bivins Pointe, EJB Culinary Center, NINE-TEEN49 Catering, and Rock'D Recipes in Amarillo, Texas.

itself. And when I refer to the “boss,” I mean the individual in the supervisory role. It could be a chef, foodservice director, general manager, shift-leader, or whatever that title may be in your operation. I’ve been on both ends of this spectrum, working for chefs who cuss, yell, and throw pans at you for overcooking fish, all the way to bosses that still to this day remain close friends. In both examples, the boss could have had drastically different outcomes with different behaviors. The boss is there to provide direction and feedback, one-on-ones if necessary, and connect the employee to the organization as a whole. A toxic relationship between an employee and the person they report to hinders their engagement, confidence, and overall commitment. This will quickly leave an employee with a hopeless feeling that will push them out.

2. **Boredom/Feeling**

Insignificant. Another reason employees leave is simple boredom, or a sense of insignificance. The foodservice environment is very repetitious, and that can become pretty mundane for many employees. Most people spend

roughly one-third of their daily lives working, getting ready for work, or traveling to and from work. That’s a lot of time to be bored. As humans, we desire challenge and have a subconscious need to be part of a greater goal. If any member of your staff feels insignificant in any way, beware. If an employee doesn’t sense they have anything to work for, or that their work doesn’t matter to you, then they will simply stop doing it.

3. **Coworker Relations.**

Then there’s the workplace culture—the relationship with coworkers. Is the atmosphere cheerful and friendly? Is it quiet, tense, and gloomy? I’ve been in many kitchens where the tension is so thick you could literally cut it with a knife. On the other hand, in nearly every resignation letter I’ve read, there’s mention of a coworker who will be missed (and it’s rarely the boss). Second only to the relationship with the boss, this relationship(s) molds the environment for the better...or worse. If your staff gets “clique-y”—like many do—the employees who feel left out will find a way out permanently.

4. **Work Environment.** The final leg to the staffing table is the environment on a daily basis. This is more of a feeling than a tangible item. Yet, from the top of the organization all the way down, its effects are known (and rarely discussed). Often it looks like the administration “keeping secrets” from hourly staff to a point where something happens, and the staff feels bombarded and overwhelmed. This is fundamentally a lack of trust. The hourly staff finds it easier to quit for the grass that’s greener on the other side, than to walk on eggshells waiting for the next big move within the operation. If there’s nothing to look forward to at work, most employees will find a reason to stop coming in at all.

STAFFING SOLUTIONS

So what can we do about these issues? How can we slow or even stop these Cause and Effect scenarios? We must look at them individually, and then get INNOVATIVE in our own departments. Here are a few things I’ve seen and done that have real, lasting results quickly attached.

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Rocky Dunnam will co-present a breakout session

with Matt Huffman, MS, RD, LD at ANFP’s Annual Conference & Expo (ACE) in Las Vegas this summer. Their June 7 session—Dynamic Duo: Optimizing QAPI With the CDM and RD—will provide a comprehensive overview of how the CDM and RD can work together to improve quality assurance and performance improvement measures. Learn more at www.ANFPonline.org/ACE17

Boss/Subordinate Relationships

- Start small. Take five minutes upon arriving each morning to personally say “Hello, how are you?” to every employee. For some, this may mean instructing your managers to do so. This will start the day by subconsciously telling your staff that you know they are there, and you are happy to see them. Many times, this simple gesture is all it takes.
- Organize “Employee Benefits” in some fashion. This should be something that you do for the entire staff that isn’t expected as a part of their job. I like to find a time when most of my staff can take a lunch, or even a 15-minute break, and make them a new recipe I’m considering. We call it the “Family Meal.” Once or twice each week I’ll produce something that either utilized over-prepped product, or sometimes new recipes



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engage in the job at hand, and your operation will be better for it... “If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients.”



for upcoming menus. I make enough that the entire staff can have a serving. It indirectly creates a time for us to discuss things informally, and employees feel like they have input into what's coming.

Boredom/Feeling Insignificant

- Seek employee opinions on things happening in the kitchen. Employees that feel like their input matters instinctively do one of two things: 1) They create more opinions, and/or 2) They feel meaningful.
- Reward them! This may seem simple, but when was the last time you rewarded an employee? This might be as simple as tasting a batch of mashed potatoes they prepared and saying "Wow...that's incredible" audibly, or (if budget permits) buying high achievers movie tickets or gift cards, or giving good old-fashioned cash money. This is essentially an improvised bonus structure for hourly staff.

Coworker Relations

- This one gets tricky. We all have had to deal with that one employee who seems to suck the life out of a room and chronically makes everyone cranky. I suggest you relieve that person of their duties quickly, before they destroy the morale of your entire staff.
- Generally speaking, are your employees friends? Do they know about each other's hobbies and families? The Family Meal (referenced earlier) is a good way to promote coworker relationships.
- Organize cross-training days. Maybe one day each week you (yes YOU, the boss) work a station in

the kitchen. In turn, the employee whom you are relieving cross-trains another station. This will develop more trained personnel, and will build relationships and respect for each other. Example: I work the prep shift, and my prep cook works in the bakery for that shift. Win-win.

Work Environment

- This is 100 percent up to you as a boss. The culture above you may or may not be as you want it, and you might not have the ability to do anything about that, but you can control the culture for those you manage. I put everything on the line with my staff. Sometimes that means letting them know about tough decisions before they are made (like staffing cuts), but I've found that employees respond better when they know that I'm not keeping any secrets.
- Be positive. Your attitude is very contagious. Even when you feel irritated, stressed, etc., you need to "fake it 'til you make it." So smile and use your inside voice.

TRUE INNOVATION

Want to see some real commercial kitchen innovations? Start with the team that operates your commercial kitchen! When you invest in your people, they will engage in the job at hand, and your operation will be better for it. Sir Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, put it best when he said, "Your clients do NOT come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients." And if he's not innovative (owning more than 400 companies), no one is. **E**

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- What is innovation?
 - Installing the newest equipment before anyone else
 - To change or transform something
 - Hiring consultants
- What is the average turnover rate of hospitality staff?
 - 71 percent
 - 50 percent
 - 93 percent
- What is the number one reason employees quit their jobs?
 - To make more money with a competitor
 - A bad relationship with the boss
 - Moving to another city
- How much of the day do most employees spend in work-related activity?
 - One-quarter
 - One-fifth
 - One-third
- Which is not a good way to innovate in regards to staffing?
 - Say "hello" to employees first thing every morning
 - Compliment your staff on a job well done
 - Let the staff do whatever they want like they own the place
- What are the two main goals of cross-training?
 - Better trained staff and improved staff relations
 - Better trained staff and quicker turnaround of new employees
 - Improved staff relations and stronger resumes
- What is Cause and Effect?
 - When global warming makes people sweaty
 - When excuses become relevant
 - When one thing causes a result to happen repeatedly

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