



MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

HOW TO CREATE A CULTURE OF SUCCESS AND SUPPORT

BY CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD

FOOD SERVICE CAN BE CHAOTIC AND STRESSFUL at times—but creating a positive work environment can lead to a happier, more productive team. When staff feels valued and included, they'll thrive in their roles. Let's look at five ways you can cultivate this culture of success and support in your kitchen.

1. FOCUS ON A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT DESPITE TURNOVER.

Foodservice settings are notorious for high turnover. Employees need a job, but are not necessarily looking for a lifelong career.

Is it worth it to focus on positive corporate culture in these situations, where staff may leave frequently? Research suggests the answer is yes.

A study in *The American Journal of Medicine* looked at employees at Veterans Affairs Medical Centers. They found that higher satisfaction with the organization was linked to improved patient safety and satisfaction. This was separate from the employees' ratings of their job-specific satisfaction.

In other words, even if employees were not highly pleased with their specific job, some were still satisfied with the organizational culture as a whole. That made a difference in operational quality (in this case, patient ratings). While this particular study looked at employees across health care, it's plausible that this data could extend to many foodservice settings as well.

Turnover isn't going away anytime soon, but a positive environment can still impact job performance while employees are there—and perhaps may create loyalty that encourages them to stay longer.

In addition, your organization's reputation for positive culture may impact hiring. Research from Management Recruiters International found that 69 percent of job candidates ranked an employer's brand strength as important or very important when deciding to accept a position. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your department became known for its great work environment and attracted more interested and qualified candidates?

2. ESTABLISH CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES.

Pretend you just arrived at a lecture. The presenter tells you and the others in the room: "These chairs are set up wrong. Fix them in the next 30 seconds please."

Odds are, you would (understandably) be confused. Why are the chairs wrong? What does a successful set-up look like? What's the criteria for "fixing" the chairs? Add in the time pressure, and it's easy to see how this situation could be overwhelming and frustrating.

If you don't set clear expectations for employees, it's exactly like placing them in the situation above. Staff need to understand exactly what is required of them to avoid confusion and frustration (on their end and yours). When you set clear expectations, you're implementing



a framework for employees to be confident and effective in their roles.

Here are some tips for establishing these expectations and supporting your staff:

- Write down a clear job description for each role on your team. This document should include the staff member's responsibilities and the standards for measuring success. This can be used in the hiring process as well as during performance evaluations.
- Provide adequate training when staff is hired that covers every aspect of their job description. Allow staff to demonstrate tasks back to you during training to ensure they truly understand, rather than simply verbalizing such.
- Communicate both the *how* and the *why* behind tasks. Several studies suggest that foodservice employees



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may not perform tasks properly due to knowledge deficits and dietary or food safety beliefs. Addressing both the *how* and the *why* helps ensure they are motivated to complete duties properly.

- Give feedback frequently, both positive and constructive. It's important to encourage what people are doing correctly—as well as what you hope to improve. These can be informal conversations as well as formal performance reviews.
- Create an environment where non-critical mistakes are considered learning experiences rather than disappointing failures, which can allow employees to grow in their mindset and performance.
- Emphasize two-way conversation. Be open to employees asking questions or providing feedback. This will validate their experiences and help you refine processes.

3. “BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE.”

According to the 2022 Workplace Performance Index, 46 percent of employees report that their managers don’t help solve problems or explore new ideas, and 53 percent report their managers don’t collaborate with employees on day-to-day work.

But aren’t these concepts—problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation—the same skills we want our employees to develop? Wouldn’t these be key pieces of a positive company culture?

Let’s try shifting these statistics by embracing the famous words: “Be the change you want to see” (actually a common misattribution of Gandhi’s words, but the quote holds true nonetheless). If you want motivated, team-oriented employees, you need to embody that yourself. To do this, try the following:

- Strike the right balance between allowing employees to develop autonomy and helping them solve problems. Recognize that choosing the right approach will vary based on the situation.
- Be willing to jump in when short staffed and work alongside your employees.
- Avoid gossip and complaining. (Constructive conversations are worthwhile; aimless complaining helps no one.)
- Follow the same standards you expect others to follow (for example, timeliness and work ethic).
- Be consistent in implementation and follow-through with policies and procedures.
- Show genuine care and concern for those around you (both staff and residents/students).
- Advocate for your department with management and human resources.
- Maintain composure under pressure and manage stress appropriately.
- Keep a positive attitude.

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Doing these things is simple in theory, but admittedly tough in practice. It’s not easy being a leader, but you can take the reins and set the tone for the rest of the team. Be the person you would want to follow and take pride in being that role model.

4. CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS TOGETHER.

Did your department meet its goal to reduce food waste this quarter? Did your team host an amazing special event that got positive local press? Or maybe your staff just completed an extra busy season without any major mishaps?

Whatever the achievement may be, take the time to recognize and celebrate your team’s successes. This helps to build morale, shows that you support your staff, and keeps everyone motivated towards continuing their best work.

Here are some ideas for possible celebrations or rewards:

- Purchase books with themes of success or leadership, and provide one to each of your team members. Even consider used books, which can be found for a few dollars at thrift stores and can be quite impactful.
- Throw a pizza party for lunch—the quintessential elementary school reward works well for grown-ups too!
- Provide your team the opportunity to attend a professional development training at no cost to them. It’s a win-win—they’ll walk away with career-enhancing skills, and your organization will benefit because of it.
- Partner with a local farm to have a few boxes of fresh produce delivered and let team members shop for a certain number of items to take home. Supporting their health can have long-lasting benefits.
- Provide \$5 gift cards to a local coffee shop.
- Hire a massage therapist to come in for a few hours to do chair massages for your team.

5. RECOGNIZE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES.

In addition to celebrating team successes, it's also important to acknowledge individual employees. A survey from the American Psychological Association found that employees who feel valued are more likely to report higher levels of job motivation and satisfaction, as well as better physical and mental health.

Plus, positive reinforcement not only makes the recipient feel good, but also sets the standard for others on the team. It shows what kind of behavior is valued within the organization.


Specificity is the key to effective praise. "Great job" doesn't mean much to the employee or the rest of the team.

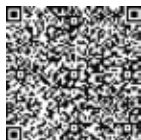
On the flip side, consider a statement like: "Joe, I really appreciate that you jumped in to help with the dishes when we were behind. You were able to help Carol and the two of you got us caught up quickly." This reinforces that team players are valued in your department, and of course, makes Joe feel good too.

In addition, you might implement formal recognition programs. For example, you could create a program where employees can nominate a coworker who's gone above and beyond. Each month, you might select one nomination to receive a

small reward (like a \$10 gift card). This encourages your staff to look for positive behaviors in others, creating an overall culture of support and appreciation.

PARTING THOUGHTS

As a foodservice manager, you can create an atmosphere where employees feel appreciated and valued. When you define expectations, provide solid leadership, and celebrate achievements, the workplace becomes a more positive environment for everyone involved—and that's a true recipe for success. 



REFERENCES

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CHRISSEY CARROLL, MPH, RD | ✉ chrissy@snackinginsneakers.com

Chrissy Carroll is a registered dietitian, freelance writer, and brand consultant based in central Massachusetts.

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This **Level I** article assumes that the reader has introductory knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of the concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.

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- Which of the following is *true* regarding research in *The American Journal of Medicine* study that looked at employees at Veterans Affairs Medical Centers?
 - Organizational satisfaction was linked to improved patient safety and satisfaction
 - Only job-specific satisfaction was linked to improved patient safety and satisfaction
 - There was no link between employee ratings and patient safety and satisfaction
- Which of the following help establish thorough expectations for employees to achieve success in your organization?
 - Clear job descriptions during hiring and evaluations
 - Thorough training when starting the position
 - Both of the above
- You are training a new employee on how to take the temperature of cooked chicken. Which of the following would be the best training scenario in a culture of success?
 - Give the employee a handbook that explains temperature control
 - Explain how to take the temperature and ask the employee to confirm they understand
 - Explain why temperature control is important, demonstrate how to use the thermometer, and ask the employee to demonstrate proper use back to you
- According to the 2022 Workplace Performance Index, what percentage of employees reported that their managers didn't help solve problems or explore new ideas?
 - 23 percent
 - 46 percent
 - 53 percent
- You've been short staffed in your department the last few weeks. Which action would be *least likely* to create positive departmental culture?
 - Jump in and help out alongside your employees
 - Advocate to human resources about increased staffing needs
 - Ask two of your 10 employees to do extra work on top of their normal responsibilities
- Your department met a major yearly goal to reduce food waste. Which action is *most likely* to create positive departmental culture?
 - Provide a special lunch for your staff as a thank you for their help
 - Accept praise from management without recognizing your team, as it was you that led the initiative
 - Don't do anything—this should be normal behavior and doesn't need a celebration
- Which of the following is *not true* regarding praise for individual employees?
 - Employees who feel valued are likely to report higher job satisfaction
 - Any generic praise like "good job" is effective
 - Positive reinforcement helps communicate valued behavior to the entire team

