

TOP 10

Ways to Better Manage Staff

This list was compiled by Sharon Vermeer, CDM, CFPP

1. START AT THE BEGINNING

If you are hiring, make sure your expectations are understood in the interview process. For example, "I have high expectations for my cooks, and I will expect you to live up to them. I'll give you plenty of training, and at times you may feel overwhelmed, but in the end, you will become an amazing cook. However, if this doesn't sound like the right environment for you, maybe this job isn't right for you!"

NOTCH IT UP Ask in-depth questions at your interviews to find out how they react to personality types as well as typical high-pressure scenarios in your kitchen.

2. COMING IN THE MIDDLE

You're new and your staff has all been there for years. What do you do? First, make the time to train with each cook individually. Watch them do their jobs, and ask questions such as, "is there an easier way?" Sometimes new eyes see things differently. Other times the old way works just fine. If nothing else, you will understand the dynamics in the kitchen.

NOTCH IT UP IMMEDIATELY find some way or thing that will make their lives easier. It's a guaranteed people-pleaser and a start at earning their respect.

3. CLEARLY STATE EXPECTATIONS

If you are making/requiring a change, make sure it is written and then discussed with everyone involved, and even those NOT involved if it is a systemic change.

NOTCH IT UP If necessary, have staff initial parts or all the written change. Keep the change posted through the introductory phase, and save it after that. When someone doesn't do what you required, point out where they initialed (which indicates they read and understood it) and ask if there is any confusion regarding the change.

4. TALK THEM UP

Recognize individual staff members in a group setting. If they are a good cook, make sure you say something like, "we're lucky to have such good cooks here at [facility]..."

NOTCH IT UP Quietly tell certain management staff about your staff's accomplishments and ask them to praise your employees in public for it.

5. WORK HARD AND SMART

Remember that your people come first. If you have a (mostly) office job, take time from your day to go out and help do something, whether it's washing dishes, making a pan of bars, or sweeping the floor. DON'T do it every day. It should be unexpected. Tell whoever's job it is that you know they are busy, and you have a few minutes so you thought you would help them out. A few minutes of goodwill can buy you a few hours of good attitude with the right person.

NOTCH IT UP When you can, take breaks with your staff, but be the LAST one to take the break, not the first. Sitting down to eat and talk about things non-work related is a great way to build rapport.

6. GET THEIR OPINION

LISTEN. What they think matters. But be clear that you are only asking for an OPINION, not the final say. You may ask cooks if a recipe or process needs to be tweaked, and ask them to help make that happen. Everyone needs to feel needed and important.

NOTCH IT UP Sit down with the group and work on your menus or work through a new process together. Let them have input on decisions, but point out things like work flow and cost. They'll come away with a new understanding of how difficult things can be and have a lot of buy-in to making the new process succeed.

7. PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Learn how to re-state their words. If an employee says, "this job is frustrating!" you can respond with "are you saying that you are not happy with your job? Can you tell me why?" If someone says "I am not treated fairly here. My colleagues must not like me," you can respond with, "I am so sorry to hear that! It must be difficult to work where you don't feel you are treated fairly. Can you tell me why you think this is happening?" By simply re-stating what you are hearing (not disagreeing or agreeing), many times you can deescalate a situation.

NOTCH IT UP Use this as an opportunity to fill out a counseling statement and make a plan to fix the issue.

8. PROVIDE SUPPORT

Occasionally an employee needs a place to vent or cry. Make sure staff understands that your office is a safe place, but you won't allow certain things (yelling, violence, swearing, etc.)

NOTCH IT UP Employee Assistance Programs are your friend.

9. ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Keep notes and thank you cards in your office drawer. Remember to use them!

NOTCH IT UP Send a thank you card to an employee's home. This way their family may see it too.

10. DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT.

Face it. Sometimes it's a battle you're not going to win. The only recourse then is to document all interactions, good and bad. The first step should be to document chronologically, in whatever record your facility prefers. Include dates and times, what happened, and any reaction (facts, not opinions). A counseling statement conducted with the person is next, complete with clear expectations, requirements for change, and a timeline. If you still don't see results, follow this up with a warning. If necessary, release them from employment. It is a good idea to have someone else in the room during disciplinary action.

NOTCH IT UP Make sure your employee sees all the written documentation you are keeping. It's difficult to argue when all the information is in front of you, and many times when they see your records, that alone helps fix the problem.