

# **'Six Ways to Improve Food & Beverage Service'**

## **Using Progressive Human Resource Practices**

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We are regularly called on to provide consulting for strategic or master planning initiatives. It is interesting to note that many club clients soon request that we broaden our services to include analysis of operations with a concentration in food and beverage. Historically the food and beverage department is an area that has caused considerable concern within the leadership group.

Our approach to an analysis of the food and beverage department must include a review of the following areas:

- θ Human Resource Issues
- θ Facility Analysis
- θ Product Quality
- θ Service Quality
- θ F & B Financial Results
- θ Marketing
- θ Governance Issues

To complete the review effectively we must have a comprehensive fact-finding process in place that includes a membership survey, employee survey and leadership strategy survey. Each of these items is important to understand the big picture and provides the consultant needed information to make the proper evaluation and recommendations.

At the top of the list is the evaluation of human resource practices within the club. This evaluation is centered on a six point approach to improve the relationship between the management / leadership and the club staff. The employees are the human resources of the club. Human resources are the vehicle by which all progress and effective change can take place.

Adopting a comprehensive approach to HR issues will affect all club employees. This effect will certainly be felt within the F & B department. Therefore, to insure that progress can be made toward improvement of overall club service, and more directly service within the F & B department, a solid foundation must be in place regarding the HR practices throughout the total organization.

### **Six Point Service Improvement Plan**

#### **1. Complete an Employee Survey**

If we do not understand how employees think and feel about the club we cannot

address their concerns. What we find most often is that compensation is always the lowest rated issue. Just as important to note are the answers to questions that are closely related to the ability of the employee to generate compensation. Normally, orientation, training and pay for performance are important concerns. The following statements receive low ratings on most surveys. Low ratings reveal an underlying problem with the basic foundation of the organization:

- o I have a chance to learn new skills.**
- o I am provided training to handle the job properly.**
- o There are enough qualified people in my area.**
- o Poor performance is not usually tolerated.**
- o Better performers are paid better.**
- o There is a link between performance and reward.**

It is also common to find food and beverage employees rating these statements lower than employees of other departments. Many times F & B employees are younger and less career orientated. They relate differently to the club than do employees of other departments. An approach to employee development that more closely addresses their needs will pay dividends. That approach must be goal orientated and have a delineated path toward greater rewards for quality performance.

The survey is the first step in the process. Knowing what the problems are will allow management to focus more closely on solutions to those problems. This focus must include a process that sets employees up for success early. It must give employees the tools to be successful and provide a specific step by step approach to maximize their potential.

## **2. Provide a Comprehensive Orientation**

It all begins when the employee is first hired. New employee orientation must include an overview of the full facility and service provided by the club. New employees must meet all department heads and learn how each department interacts with the others to provide a positive member experience and fulfill the overall mission of the club.

It is critical that new F & B employees complete a comprehensive training program so they can perform to a reasonable level of the existing staff. We want to insure that new employees are not learning on the job and making mistakes to the detriment of member service. Meeting consistent service guidelines requires that an employee understand the basics prior to being placed in a position where their mistakes can ruin a member's dining experience. Part of a comprehensive training process will require the new employee to pass a competency test prior to being placed in a position to serve the members. The club must insure that a new employee has a minimum level of ability. Testing at least determines if someone has absorbed the information. It cannot guarantee,

however, that the employee will put to work the knowledge they have accumulated.

### **3. Make Training a Priority**

The key aspect of developing a top notch F & B operation is having an effective training process in place. When reviewing the opinions we receive from the F & B employees we can see that there is a real opportunity in this area. Training must be a priority with all management and supervisors. When an employee is promoted to a supervisory role they should be told that first they are being promoted to trainer. A second part of the job is also supervision and oversight to insure training has been effective.

The club should adopt one of many prototype service training programs or develop its own specialized program. The Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) has a good club specific training program called Unlocking the secrets of exceptional service. The program is available through the CMAA resource center.

The CMAA program has three quality aspects that any program should include. First, there is an emphasis on training the trainer. As we mentioned, main emphasis of department heads, middle managers and supervisors should be training. These individuals' role in organization and oversight will be reduced by the quality of the trained staff working within their departments. Therefore, insuring that the training process is effective and consistent is a priority. A train-the-trainers session with instructor manuals can be completed by Clubwise, the General Manager or Clubhouse Manager if they feel comfortable in undertaking the process.

Second, the program has an extensive eight part process that includes:

- θ Session I – The Club, Your Members & You
- θ Session II - What the Club Expects from You
- θ Session III – Club Food Server Basics
- θ Session IV – Serving Your Members
- θ Session V – The Art of Suggest
- θ Session VI – Focus on Wine Basics and Wine Service
- θ Session VII – Planning the Member Needs During the Meal
- θ Session VIII – Professionalism, Complaints and Work Safety

Each session can be modified to add club specific information to tailor the program to the individual club. At the end of each session is a test to insure that the participants have grasped the important elements. Third, the program comes with a video to facilitate the process.

Each employee receives a training manual for notes. They can keep the manual

with any other handouts from the club as a permanent reference. They will have the experience of being able to dissect the job into segments for easy memory.

Obviously this is a service training program. There also needs to be general training for all F & B employees regarding how they can best work together to achieve the maximum experience for the member. The Chef needs to develop training sessions for the individuals within his department that center, not only on preparing quality products, but also their role in the total dining experience.

#### **4. Concentrate on Pay for Performance**

Part of any orientation should include how the employee can progress in the organization. Each person wants to know what is expected of them. They also want to know that if they do a good job they will be recognized and rewarded.

The two aspects of good employees are a high level of technical knowledge and the ability to put that knowledge to work for the benefit of the organization. It may seem that these go hand in hand, but that is not necessarily the case. Management should understand the difference and be able to relate club performance standards and expectations to new and existing employees.

Unfortunately we have not found this approach to be a common practice with many of our client clubs. Putting technical knowledge to work to the benefit of the membership has not been a regular priority mindset within the departments. We find this to be especially true in the F & B department. By rearranging orientation priorities and focusing on performance based compensation programs, employees will understand how best to provide the maximum work effort that will achieve for them the maximum compensation for the position they now hold.

Some clubs have instituted a testing and evaluation process within the F & B department. A similar program developed by Clubwise is called ***'The Certified Club Server Program.'*** Initial training includes a competency test on basic information before an employee is allowed to serve members. As training advances past the initial process, higher level competency tests have been developed. Employees receive recognition in some form. Clubs have used titles like level I, II and III to designate those individuals that have proved a higher level of understanding of all aspects of service. With each level increase comes an increase in their pay level. ***The only way a service person gets a pay increase is to prove their technical ability by passing the test. Seniority plays little part in the process.***

In association with testing, clubs have adopted a weekly, biweekly or monthly evaluation process. It does not make any difference how technically knowledgeable someone may be if they do not put that knowledge to work to benefit the club. Clubs evaluate the employee on those things that really make the organization run well. Some of these may include:

- θ Friendliness / Courtesy
- θ Salesmanship
- θ Dress / Uniforms
- θ Completion of Back of the House Duties
- θ Cooperation / Flexibility
- θ Timeliness / Rules
- θ Sanitation / Respect of Property

Each pay period employees can earn commission over and above base pay. The amount of commission earned is based on how well the employee is evaluated based on the above criteria. Obviously wait staff compensation varies substantially between markets. For example consider the following pay scale:

Employee Rating	Base Rate	Possible Commission
Level 1	\$8.00	\$2.00
Level 2	\$9.00	\$2.50
Level 3	\$10.00	\$3.00
Level 4	\$11.00	\$4.00

With such a pay scale the employees would only be guaranteed the base rate. They would have to earn the commission regularly. If the work ethic of the employee deteriorated for some reason, the system of evaluation would recognize this and the employee would make less commission. Understanding that all employees want to make the maximum, they strive to put into practice all they know to the benefit of the member customer. Such systems have shown a remarked improvement in member service.

The system does something very important. It puts pressure on the supervisors to effectively monitor each person's performance and deal with issues in a timely manner. If an employee does not make full commission, there is a sheet in their pay check telling them why and what they need to do. This is an incredible tool to insure continued two-way communication between the employee and supervisor.

## 5. Consider Adopting Disney On Stage Standards

One of the objectives of the Walt Disney Company was to be sure that the employees knew what type of business they were in (The Entertainment Business) and what was expected of them while on property. Since the corporate concept was to consider employees entertainers, they developed the **ON STAGE** concept. If an employee is on stage they are in front, or in view of the customer as an entertainer would be. If they are off stage, they are out of sight of the customer. When at work and traveling to and from work as they enter and leave the property, they will fall into one of 4 classifications. They will be either:

- θ Off Stage – Off the Clock

- θ Off Stage – On the Clock
- θ On Stage – On the Clock
- θ On Stage – Off the Clock

Based on each class they are given rules of acceptable behavior. This is a great tool for employees to understand what is expected of them in any given situation. Using the club environment as an example, you can see that an employee is On Stage – Off the Clock when entering the parking lot and moving into the building. While on stage they represent the club and should be careful of their behavior even if they are not on the clock.

Clubs should consider adopting a similar set of standards. By breaking the job down into such segments for all employees, it is our belief that the organization would provide a more professional image and embarrassing circumstances would be kept to a minimum.

## **6. Form an Employee Committee**

The club benefits most when employees are involved with improving the organization. This can best be done by having an employee committee that is part of the process. The HR director should chair the employee committee and report back at the regularly scheduled meeting of the senior staff.

Once a committee is constituted then they should be tasked to make recommendations for, but not limited to:

- θ Employee communications / newsletter
- θ Activities / employee events
- θ Benefit recommendations / awards / incentives
- θ Orientation
- θ Employee rules

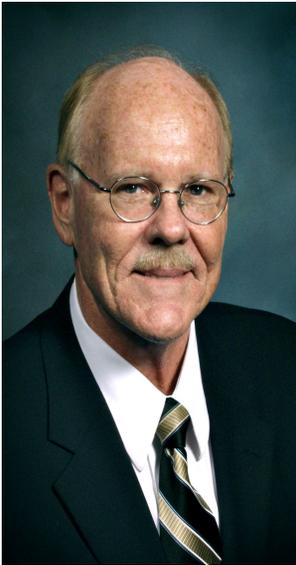
An active employee committee should help develop a set of principles to work by for all employees. This concept can be developed into an orientation piece for all employees. For example, one club developed a motto of 'Whatever It Takes' and adopted the following principles:

1. Communicate clearly up and down
2. Be honest and trustworthy
3. Have a commitment to excellence
4. Be flexible, adaptable and cooperative
5. Be dependable
6. Understand the sense of urgency
7. Work effectively under pressure
8. Be creative and use good judgment
9. Don't take confrontations personally

## 10. Have a positive attitude

Specific employees were asked to write a statement explaining why certain principles were important in their jobs. A brochure was printed and distributed to all new employees and used as the centerpiece of the orientation process. It is better for fellow employees to tell new employees what is expected of them than to have the manager do so. It has a much greater impact on the importance of each principle.

By adopting this six step approach to improving HR practices, we believe the club will develop a solid foundation for improved service. We have instituted such changes in clubs with very positive results. Each manager should review their present practices against these six steps. We believe this is a solid approach to long term progress.



Jerry N. McCoy, MCM, is the President of Clubwise, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in strategic planning, master planning, operational audits and governance issues. He is the author of The Director's Guide for Understanding Club Governance, The Governance Checklist and The Board Resource Manual all of which are publications of CMAA's Premier Club Services®, the new Strategic Management Handbook for private clubs and is an extensive contributor to the new CMAA Facilities and Amenities Texts Volume I & II which are available through Bookmart. He can be reached at [www.clubwiseconsulting.com](http://www.clubwiseconsulting.com) or [CMAAMCM@msn.com](mailto:CMAAMCM@msn.com)