

Partnerships for Profit

BY BARRY MORGAN AND JOHN NICK

Nobody ever listens to the food service staff! It takes forever to get anything done around here and all the owners ever think about is saving money. Even when they do ask us for ideas, nobody ever listens. There's lots of ways we could be better. The sandwiches are boring, the plates are chipped and the cutlery is cheap and bent.

The kitchen is never really cleaned and the equipment is always breaking down when no one's around. They never treat us with much respect but they expect us to go out and serve their guests enthusiastically. We are supposed to take pride in our work. But how can we be proud of *this* menu, it hasn't changed for a year. If we have to serve sandwiches, why not make them great sandwiches. And why can't we get that special local brew everyone is asking for? We never seem to do anything new around here! Even our regulars are starting to complain, but nobody seems to listen to them either. Doesn't anybody care? Why don't the owners check out the competition and see what's really cooking these days? All we ever hear is there's no money in food and beverage. If that's true why should I kill myself trying to make this place a success? I'll bet if I was running this place I could really turn things around!

Does this sound familiar?

Partnerships for Profit is not about your ownership, your investments or your hard work. It is about making the best use of your available resources. It's not about losing control or relinquishing decision-making. But it is about sharing the thrill of success.

Illustration: Mark Kilias



Elixir for Mediocrity

An olde concoction for minimizing success

Blend together
a handful of mistrust and a lack of genuine respect

Remove
personal recognition, participation and any authority to make decisions

Add
a pinch of irritation with incompetence coupled with a stubborn sense of knowing what's right

Top with
an expectation of unconditional loyalty

Serve
in a cold atmosphere satisfied with the knowledge that their pride is never tough, if you chew it long enough

Caution
Excessive consumption may ruin you

Service Tip
Birds will never fly if they are always caged!

Bon appetit!

Let's hope the recipe above is popular only at your competitor's golf courses.

Recently we enjoyed a visit to a local club offering that "Private Club for the Day" experience. And what an experience! We felt like we were the only customers they had to look after that day and look

after us they did. The moment we arrived at the clubhouse the doors were opened for us. We were greeted with a warm smile and pleasant comment everywhere we went. Our servers seemed to anticipate our expectations and worked hard to exceed them. The food was superb and the entire facility was immaculate. Everyone from the host to the housekeeper made us feel important. We knew they knew we were there. And they cared!

So you too have decided you want to be the best! You've determined the only way for your food service operation to succeed is by providing exceptional service and facilities to your customers. Now what?

You can be certain it's not going to happen by accident. Lady Luck rarely smiles on those who haven't prepared to receive her.

If you are sincere in your quest for success you will need to be willing to succeed - in other words there's a price tag attached. Years ago that price was sim-

ply ingenuity and hard work. Long hours and dedication to your customers earned you a reputation that did you proud. Too bad that's not enough anymore.

In recent years the food service industry has changed dramatically. Competition has increased significantly. Nowadays, your customers and your staff are far more knowledgeable and therefore much more demanding. Government legislation has

grown like a mushroom, adding enormously to the cost of running your operation. Your standards must be higher than ever before just to meet continually growing expectations. As well, today you face staff members who increasingly challenge your decisions. These are the new realities and to succeed in spite of them you must learn the new rules of the game.

The most important of these is that success is a team sport. Partnerships for profit is about providing your staff with an opportunity to communicate and participate in the decision-making process. Individual and group recognition is essential on an ongoing basis. Sharing the glory is the price of success.

When you're building widgets it may be possible to measure your success merely on the basis of what you produce. The product is what counts. However, in the food service industry, your product is dealing with people. What you produce becomes intimately entwined with the way you produce it. The experience becomes paramount.

Your goal is to make your customers feel good. Regardless of whether they are in your lounge for a quick beverage after their game or in the banquet room enjoying the post tournament buffet, they must be having fun. In a fiercely competitive environment there is no such thing as an unhappy repeat customer and there are very few successful one-time service operations. Even if you are the only club for miles around you most certainly are not the only game in town.

Naturally, the golf course must be in great shape and the food outstanding. But no matter how tasty the steak, if it is served with the wrong attitude, the meal and perhaps the entire day will be unpleasant. Remember "attitude of staff" is the number one reason why most customers do not return in the food service industry. Conversely, even a mediocre event can become a memorable experience if your customers are properly "entertained" by the staff who have been motivated to add "sizzle to the steak".

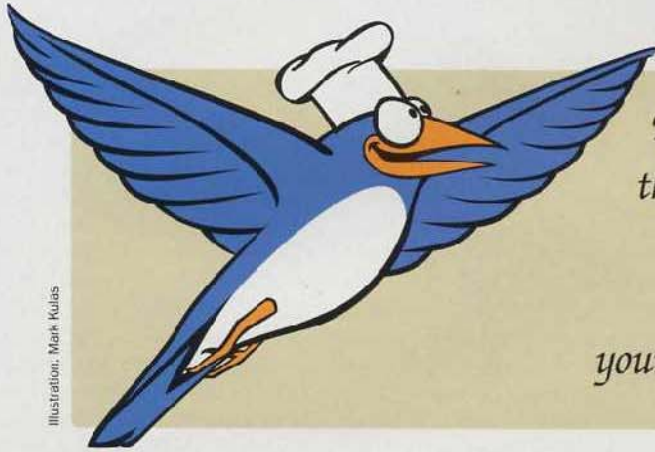


Illustration: Mark Kulias

*Birds will never fly if they are always caged!
Let the birds fly.
When the birds soar,
your spirits will soar too.*

It is impossible for negative staff to provide positive service. Motivated staff are the key to success in food service management. You depend on your staff to look after the details, doing all the little things that will earn the appreciation of your guests. They must go beyond the technical execution of their duties and add a warm personal touch to their efforts. The tired old concepts of "divide and conquer" and "merely inform them on a need-to-know basis" are no longer relevant in today's workplace. Ultimately, you depend on your employees for your livelihood and your success rests in their hands. Therefore, it makes sense to consider them as active partners in your business operation and to ensure that they bring a positive outlook to your partnership.

The dictionary defines a partner as "1. an associate in an activity or sphere of common interest". Other definitions include "2. spouse", "3. either of two people dancing together", and "4. a member of the team in a game or sport". Metaphorically, any of these definitions work.

Successful partnership rests on the respect given to each member of the service team, and on the trust you genuinely extend to the staff in their efforts to achieve success for you, and for themselves. Never forget that your employees also seek success. And most have the desire to improve even when your support is not evident or given. The key is harnessing their talents.

Owners, management and staff must work in unison towards the organization's goals and vision as interdependent individuals actively seeking a common objective. There must be a strong degree of trust between the owners and the people that work for, and with, them and this new level of respect is paramount for tomorrow's legacies of success. Coming to terms with this fundamental principle is not insurmountable.

As an operator your natural fear of losing control adversely affects the positive momentum of your success. This "control paranoia" may be defined as a lack of trust combined with an inability to accept others making decisions, on your behalf, in the best interests of the operation. And we are all at least a little guilty!

The transition from familiar central control to a more broadly-based partnership will be difficult for some. The necessary controls will need to be in place to permit the development of a sense of trust within your organization. Expectation levels will need to be clearly defined and your staff will need to understand the goals and objectives of your organization. The vision and values of the business will need to be supported. In the ideal world, these will be shared principles which you have developed with your entire team and which your team has sincerely embraced.

Food service employees often express with frustration that they lack the opportu-

nity to participate and that they are afforded little personal recognition for their efforts. Many owners and operators believe their staff work only for the money. They are wrong! Of course competitive remuneration is important. But money must never be considered a long-term motivator. Repeatedly studies have shown that bonuses fail to motivate. On the other hand personal pride as a result of participation in a successful venture and meaningful recognition for the efforts and contribution to this success is treasured long after the cash has been spent!

Unfortunately, this "new" approach to running your business is not something you can simply announce on Monday morning and expect to have in place by Friday afternoon. It's a long process and you will need to be prepared to accept initial failures along the way. Mistakes are a natural and necessary part of the process. Once recognized, these temporary setbacks can and must, become opportunities to cultivate the development of your partnership with your staff.

There are ten progressive steps to building a long term Partnership for Profit.

1. Establish a vision for the future and develop clear corporate boundaries within which you are willing to work based on your fundamental principles and ideals.
2. Seek team leaders with the attitude

and stamina necessary to carry your organization toward your vision.

3. Share your vision with the stakeholders on your team.
4. Establish team objectives that reflect the team's desire to embrace the corporate vision and values.
5. Provide the team members with sufficient tools and training to carry out their duties effectively.
6. Encourage your team to take chances. Allow them to make mistakes without condemning them for their initial failures.
7. Develop a positive atmosphere where team members contribute to each other's development.
8. Establish an effective system to measure and report results.
9. Let your staff garner the credit for your success. Celebrate the little successes as they happen. Dismiss the failures, but learn from them.
10. Trust your staff and teach yourself to appreciate the efforts they are making on your behalf. Expect extremely high standards but guard against taking these for granted.

We all know that as the owner or operator your views and decisions must always be right - right? WRONG!

Let the birds fly.

As the partnership grows, your role as owner or manager will need to evolve as well. The success of this undertaking will depend on the long term focus of your efforts. Doing it your way will not be the order of the day. Rather, you will need to become the messenger, a presenter of ideas, the coach on the sidelines directing the plays. If you want your team to be effective you will need to let them make the plays. Your job is to provide the resources necessary to ensure the success of your team.

To help encourage the development of a team attitude remember to:

- Hire for attitude and train to obtain skills
- Remember if you want them to change - you need to change first!
- Motivate employees by making each player feel that they belong
- Ask questions then actively listen to the response
- Make your staff feel proud of what they do and the way they are doing it
- Continually thank individually for individual efforts
- Reward the team for team successes
- Focus on solutions
- Keep the atmosphere positive (at almost any cost)
- Implement a program of employee Participation and Recognition

The results and information gained from the measuring tools you employ will need to be shared in a positive climate. Complaints for example should no longer be cause for discipline. Instead, they must become a device for learning. Over time you will need to embody the concept that your employees are keenly on your side. What they do on occasion may not be exactly right and this will affect the whole team. However, on these occasions your long-term success would be best served by examining the impact this activity has had on the other members of your team and the overall organization than by focusing on the individual who has committed the indiscretion. In such a climate, over time, the players on your team will police themselves and positive attitudes will flourish. We all want to be part of a winning team.

A short list of a few ideas that have worked:

- In-house idea fairs - staff culinary competitions / menu presentations

- Attendance at one-day seminars - motivational/management/trade/first aid courses
- In-house presentations with guest speakers or local suppliers
- Trading places - let staff trade jobs with their co-workers for brief periods
- Rewards based on implementing cost-saving ideas / Newsletter - employee recognition
- Wall of champions - Post photographs of achievers highlighting their special performance
- Local Conferences / Trade Shows / Encourage membership in local professional associations
- Initiate staff charity drives to raise funds for special causes
- Staff celebration with families - Summer Family Barbecue
- Tournament Day for suppliers and staff
- Site Visits to other locations /Regular staff meetings, evaluations and reviews
- Press Releases with local media
- Local group activities - inter-club slow pitch tournaments

Please let us know what successful programs you have implemented. ▶

Barry Morgan

Barry Morgan has over 20 years' hospitality management experience in Kingston, Windsor and Dundas Ontario. He is presently employed as the General Manager of Marine Drive Golf Club in Vancouver, B.C. Barry is a Fellow of the Canadian Society of Club Managers and has served on the Board of Directors of the Club Managers' Association of America since 1994.

John Nick

John Nick is the Principal of Golf Strategies & Concepts, a Vancouver based consulting company. As a recognized strategist and industry facilitator his professional activities include media editorials and public speaking engagements. He has recently become a published poet.