

Fall is an exciting time of year for Shane Todd, multi-Unit Operator of two FSUs in Athens, Georgia. It's when 30,000 college students return to the University of Georgia after three months away from school. For Todd, that means a rush of new customers and a row of fresh faces behind the registers at his Restaurants, one of which is located just a couple of miles from the university. "The first thing we have to look forward to in the fall is increased business," Todd says. "Second, we look forward to an influx of new employees."

Indeed, fall signals a change in staffing: High school seniors leave for college, college seniors for full-time jobs. "Fresh faces are good," Todd says. "New people come in with energy and excitement and that impacts the team that you already have." During staffing transitions, a focus on Operational Excellence and continuous training is even more crucial to ensure that customers enjoy excellent food and service at the hands of attentive and courteous employees. Operators seasoned in efficient staffing share their processes for maintaining Operational Excellence while focusing on recruiting and retaining top-notch talent during the fall transition.

Stay Ahead of the Curve

Operator Carter Hall of College Station, Texas, knows what it takes to weather a fall staffing transition. With proper planning and forethought, each of his incoming team members has the opportunity to train and assimilate with outgoing ones. He

views this deliberate overlap of schedules as a crucial ingredient to a successful transition.

Hall's Mall Restaurant near Texas A&M University employs almost entirely high school and college students, who often spend their summers in larger cities such as Dallas, Houston and Austin. But come fall, most return to College Station—and to Chick-fil-A. "Many of our college students, of the ones who do leave, come back in the fall," Hall says. Hall has mastered this transition to the advantage of his business. He hires team members not for the moment, but for the future, planning for seasonal turnover months in advance. In March, he was already recruiting team members for August.

The same is true for Todd. Of 70 team members, he transitions approximately 10 every fall. He begins recruiting new employees at least six months before he actually needs them. "It's all about staying ahead of the game," he says. "You don't think about fall in fall. You think about fall in winter."

Train to Retain

College-adjacent Restaurants aren't the only ones that experience fall staffing shuffles. Operator Billy Lynch of Wilmington, North Carolina, employs mostly high school and college students and working parents. "Fall is the time of year when both students and adults think about change in their lives," he says. But change in team members' personal lives should not mean change in service. "When you have those staffing transitions, you want to make sure that the customer feels it as little as possible."



Billy Lynch focuses on training and retention.

Transitions

Focusing on retaining and training team members keeps Operational Excellence high, even when turnover occurs.

for Fall Staffing

Training is the most effective tool for ensuring a consistent customer experience and maintaining Operational Excellence, Lynch says. Not only does training help orient new employees, but it also helps retain existing ones, who appreciate having a job where they can continually learn and grow. Lynch works with his Unit Training Coordinator to provide his team with an average of 10 to 15 hours of ongoing training every week. He feels that the training investment is worth it. "If you have a really strong training program in place, then you don't settle for less when you hire," he says.

Lynch has found that consistent training engages employees to deliver Operational Excellence more consistently. "Even if a customer has an attachment to one employee, they're still going to get great service and great food even when a new employee serves them because we've been deliberate about who we hire and how we train them," he says.

A well-trained team is also a strong driver of sales, becoming a catalyst for a chain reaction of positive interactions. A smooth running operation "is your best form of marketing, and it will help you cut costs in other areas," Lynch says. "If you are training new people and are focused on retention, then your team's going to help you build your sales even during difficult staff transition periods."

Focus on Flexibility

Although training is a must-have to ensure seamless transitions, Operators' relationships with team members are what build loyalty. Because Hall, Todd and Lynch nurture those relationships, employee retention improves.

Hall is more than a boss to his team members. He strives to be a role model, and to build trust and loyalty with his team members, which inspires them to stay and grow with the team. "My team members are invested in what they do because they appreciate who I am and the time that I take to get to know them on a personal level," Hall says. "I call them my kids. I have 25 kids, and I try to take a personal interest in what they do."

Todd understands that team members need encouragement, in the form of schedule flexibility, especially if they're in school. His schedule changes on a semester basis to accommodate team members' schedules. "In late July and August, we're really putting together the puzzle for the fall, understanding that in December or January we're going to take all those pieces, shake them up in a bag and lay them out to put a new puzzle together," he says.

Scheduling is equally important to Lynch. If team members need a break to work on a project, take a vacation, study abroad or just recharge, he's open to giving them one. He knows that happy, well-rested team members will come back to work ready to recommit themselves to the vision of Operational Excellence.

"If you're really putting time and energy into your team members, they are going to care more about their job," Lynch says. "That trickles down to the customer." **OE**



BUILDING THE PERFECT TEAM

Transforming turnover into an opportunity is simple when you've got the right team members in place. Operator Daron Stockton learned that lesson in 2004 when he took over the reins of Old Post Office Place in Evansville, Indiana. Sales were slow, and the service wasn't at the level of excellence it needed to be.

Within six months he had a new team in place. "At one point, I was thinking, 'I'll take anybody who breathes. I can train them, and I can teach them.' But that doesn't work," Stockton says. He realized that he needed to overhaul his approach to hiring.

What did work was taking the time to hire employees who could deliver attentive and courteous customer service—then working hard to keep them. Today, Stockton's strong personal relationships with his team members engender loyalty and longevity. Because he cares about his team members, they, in turn, care about his customers, he says. "Retention is everything," Stockton says, pointing out that it's impossible to grow the business if Operators have to constantly retrain their entire team.

In his first year as an Operator, Stockton generated 4 percent sales growth. The following year, he generated 8 percent growth. Last year, with a strong team finally in place, he generated 17 percent growth. "When you have team members who stay with you, who you can teach and learn from, it makes all the difference in the world."



Are Your Team Members Happy?

Use this self-assessment based on Seminar keynote speaker Patrick Lencioni's new book, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*, to identify areas of opportunity in building an engaged team.



There are few things more critical to an Operator's success than ensuring team members are fulfilled at work. Below, review the three signs that lead to a miserable job— anonymity, irrelevance and immeasurement. As you develop your team, consider how each of the three signs apply.

Anonymity

Team members cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known. Everyone needs to be understood and appreciated for his or her unique qualities by someone in a position of authority. Team members are no exception to this.

satisfaction of another person or group of people (customers, for example), an employee will not find lasting fulfillment at work and will ultimately seek it elsewhere.

Irrelevance

Team members need to know that their job matters to someone. If there is no connection between a person's work and the

Immeasurement

Team members need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves. They cannot be fulfilled in their work if their success depends on the opinions of another person—even the Operator.

Directions: Make a copy of this worksheet if you'd like to share this assessment with your management team. Then use the following scale to indicate how each statement applies. When you're done, add up your scores below.

Disagree—1 point; Hard to say—2 points; Agree—3 points

- | | |
|---|---|
| ___ 1. I am aware of the individual aspirations of my team members. | ___ 7. My team members know how their work contributes to the success of the larger organization. |
| ___ 2. My team members know how their jobs make a difference in the lives of others. | ___ 8. I know my team members' interests outside of work. |
| ___ 3. I have an objective, measurable way of assessing the success of my team members. | ___ 9. My team members know how they're doing on a given day or week. |
| ___ 4. My team members receive regular feedback about the effectiveness of their work. | ___ 10. In the course of their work, my team members know whose lives they impact. |
| ___ 5. My team members regularly discuss their lives outside of work with me. | ___ 11. I know the big things that are going on in the personal lives of my team members. |
| ___ 6. My team members understand the importance of their work. | ___ 12. My team members know how to measure their own success on the job. |

Scoring

Combine your scores for the 12 statements as indicated below.

Anonymity

Statement 1: ___
Statement 5: ___
Statement 8: ___
Statement 11: ___
Total: ___

Irrelevance

Statement 2: ___
Statement 6: ___
Statement 7: ___
Statement 10: ___
Total: ___

Immeasurement

Statement 3: ___
Statement 4: ___
Statement 9: ___
Statement 12: ___
Total: ___

- * A score of 10-12 is a probable indication that this particular sign is not a problem.
- * A score of 7-9 is an indication that this particular sign could be a problem.
- * A score of 4-6 is an indication that this particular sign needs to be addressed.