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Career Pathing

Developing a roadmap for employee success

By Joey Walters

For some employees, a career in the restaurant industry can truly become a rags-to-riches story – even if those rags were used to wash dishes. After all, many a superstar chef started out scrubbing pots on the low end of the kitchen food chain with a dream of someday running his or her own restaurant. Whether they are ultimately successful in turning that dream into reality, however, depends much more on passion, hard work and a willingness to learn than it does on a desire for financial fortune.

Thankfully, the foodservice industry offers a multitude of career development, or “career pathing,” opportunities for those willing to put in the time and effort required for success. Human resources experts understand the importance of ensuring top employees develop and advance within their respective organizations in order to help their employers become respected leaders in their field. Restaurant operators, in turn, must invest in their employees. Leaders must have the right team to succeed, to build the next generation of talent by investing, listening and developing their greatest asset: Employees.

Communication Critical

This may be easier said than done in the restaurant industry, however. With job abandonment on the rise – one study showed one out of every three voluntary terminations in quick-service restaurant establishments is a result of lack of future advancement opportunities within the company (People Report, 2006 SULEP) – leaders must show their employees the career opportunities that exist within their establishments. Organizations with an official internal communication system for restaurant management positions had 18-per-cent less turnover than organizations lacking an internal communication system (People Report, 2006 SULEP).

There is a direct connection between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction and a key driver of that satisfaction comes through engagement. Career pathing is one way to increase employee motivation and satisfaction. This process allows leaders to engage their employees in challenging job opportunities or training programs, in addition to creating a roadmap that shows employees how they can achieve their career aspirations.

This has increased employee retention dramatically in many companies, including family-owned Earl’s, a Vancouver-based chain that has grown to over 50 restaurants in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario,

Arizona and Colorado. Earl's has a designated website for hiring (www.earlswantsyou.com) because of the overwhelming interest in working for the company. Earl's looks for great personality, passion for people and hospitality, and eagerness to learn and grow. In turn, Earl's offers a fun, sociable work environment and advancement opportunities in the areas of the kitchen, service and leadership, along with award-winning training and career-development programs.

Clear Progression

In many ways, career pathing communicates the career progression available to all employees – simple, measureable, realistic, and time-based performance goals that align from the restaurant owner or managers down to the wait staff. A career-pathing program can also help a foodservice business by reviewing talent within each restaurant, developing advancement programs for top performers and knowing who can take over senior roles should a vacancy become available.

In order to implement an effective system, restaurant operators need to ensure all career-pathing programs are aligned with how the company plans to grow and it must be customized to fit the individual, values and culture of the company. Other concerns involve identifying a measuring stick of what success would look like in progressive jobs and evaluating an individual's position readiness by using real-life projects.

Boxed Sidebar:

Benefits of Career Pathing

- Engages, motivates and retains employees
- Makes employees the strategic differentiator and competitive advantage
- Creates a strong leadership pipeline for all key roles
- Builds a culture of continuous learning

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