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The Perils of Incomplete Training

Let me make a few controversial, even provocative statements on training new employees:

- ▶ How you train will influence your results.
- ▶ How you orient new employees affects how they treat your customers.
- ▶ Values and norms are important for a new employee.

Maybe these are not that insightful. Yet why is it that I observe many companies that don't seem to take the time to properly train new employees? Companies talk about best-in-class employees and service but can fall short on implementation and actions.

Many companies both large and small do a good job at training employees. But I have seen enough poorly trained employees that I feel compelled to share this story.

Into the Frying Pan

My daughter finished her first job in foodservice this past summer. She was hired by a retail entertainment company, part of a large national chain. Her role was to work in a VIP section as a server. Before she started, she took mandatory training prerequisites online. Everything seemed as if she was off to a great start—and then came the reality of her first day.

After a brief orientation, she was thrust into taking orders and serving patrons using a hand-held unit that communicates with the kitchen. It wasn't too hard, but she got little direction other than an overview of the order unit.

Day two was something else. The kitchen was short-staffed, so she was asked to man the fryer and cook chicken tenders

and french fries. She had no idea of how to use the fryer; a co-worker said, "Just cook them until they are brown"!

My daughter has been a vegetarian since she was 2. She would not know a cooked chicken nugget from uncooked. She has watched me while I cook enough



to know that things have to get to a certain temperature, but she did not know what that temperature should be.

She did the best she could, asking questions about how long to cook and reheat. She came home worrying she made someone sick by undercooking the items. Thankfully, she found out later, everything had been fully cooked.

On a different day, she was put to work at a specialty coffee machine—no, not an automated one. She does drink coffee but had never made a latte or cappuccino. She was ingenious enough to consult YouTube on how to make the drinks, but she was still worried about the end products.

Efficient Execution

I am sure the customers served by my daughter did not have great experiences; however, I would not fault my daughter but the failure of the process. As you know,

bad experiences do not create raving fans.

This large chain probably has all of the tools and processes for training staff. But it fell down in the execution. It did not have the systems in place to ensure new hires are brought in with proper orientation.

Here are tips to ensure this does not happen in your stores:

- ▶ Commit to orientation—including culture, values and objectives—for new staff members. Set the expectation with managers to put a new employee on the right path via your orientation.

- ▶ Develop processes and procedures for each stage of training. Remember the objective: to have staff that can confidently deliver your offer they way you designed it. Put follow-up processes in place to be sure that your training is implemented. When staffing is lean or time is pressing, people take shortcuts.

- ▶ "Tell-show-do" still works for training specific duties. I am a fan of old-fashioned shoulder-to-shoulder training. While technology has improved many delivery systems, personal attention to tasks and verifying the education still works.

- ▶ Use job aids for training and reference. These not only help the visual learner during training but also can be used as reference tools for new employees.

Developing a training program is just the beginning—ensuring it is followed is another matter. Next time you bring a new employee aboard, be sure to start the person off with the proper foundation so you'll be successful in delighting your customers. ■