

Get Clean: Achieving Success in the Food Service Industry



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Success in the restaurant business can be elusive. With the variety and quantity of restaurants available, it is increasingly difficult to attract new clientele and to impress regular customers. The same challenge applies to retaining employees. Keeping workers happy and productive can prove to be tricky.

There are a multitude of factors that contribute to a restaurant's success. These range from the intangible, such as the buzz surrounding an establishment, to thoroughly quantifiable measures, such as profit margin. One factor that contributes to a restaurant's success is cleanliness. Indeed, sanitation and food safety are not nuisances that must be addressed only once a health inspector or a customer has made a complaint. Instead, a proactive implementation of an effective cleaning maintenance program and dedication towards food safety can go a long way in setting up your restaurant for long-term success.

Consumer Wellness:

With everyone's busy schedules, it is not surprising that eating out is more and more of a common occurrence. According to the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association, Canadians spend 24.5% of their household food budget at restaurants.¹ However, consumers now have an unlimited choice of food service establishments at their disposal. They are also more knowledgeable about foodborne illnesses. And, they now have access to a wealth of information, notably reviews and feedback on your establishment, at the click of a mouse.

The media is increasingly investigating and reporting on food safety in establishments. Uncleanliness can no longer simply be swept under the rug. Do not take for granted that your establishment is safe from scrutiny. Take preventative measures to address sanitation and food safety before your establishment is the subject of an investigative probe.

Often, customers who notice unclean conditions will not complain to a server or manager. But, they certainly will be talking about it! In an independent nationwide consumer research study², almost 80% of participants said that they mention the tainted experience to family and friends. 70% said they never returned to that restaurant. With only one third of customers actually complaining to the manager or server, most restaurateurs will never find out why they are losing customers.

There is no doubt that consumers are more aware of food safety issues. Most respondents in the above study agreed that they hear more about foodborne illness today compared to five years ago. As a result of this newfound knowledge, clients are paying more attention to the cleanliness of food service establishments. For example:

- More than 90% of respondents say they notice dirty restaurant floors.
- 75% say they have visited a restaurant that was in their opinion, not clean.
- A large majority report concern about servers handling money and food at the same time.
- Half report dirty restrooms.
- 49% feel that the biggest irritant associated with fast-food dining is cleanliness.

The statistics leave no doubt that cleanliness plays a crucial role in the success of a restaurant.

Worker Wellness:

Not only do restaurant owners need to keep and attract customers in order to be successful, but they also have to look at ways to attract and keep employees. For workers, the large amount of food service establishments means that they also have more choice in terms of better wages, perks and working conditions.

¹ Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association, Foodservice Facts 2007

² Conducted by Strategic Foodservice Solutions and Nation's Restaurant News (June 1999)



Pleasant working conditions are a key motivational factor for employees. A clean and pleasant work environment leads to better productivity and morale. Since employee turnover is undesirable, costly, and time consuming for any business, ensuring better work conditions will improve your bottom line. For a restaurant, however, the cleanliness of the workplace becomes even more valuable. Like customers, employees also talk. Would your employees encourage their friends and family to come and eat at a restaurant if they know that it is dirty and disregards food safety? Your personnel constitutes an important resource which can also help attract or deter potential customers. By improving the cleanliness of your establishment and encouraging them to participate in its upkeep, you are not only improving productivity and morale, but you will also be improving the overall reputation of your establishment and attracting business.

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Kitchen Hygiene:

Foodborne illnesses cannot be trivialized. According to CRFA's Food Safety Code of Practice, over 8.5 million Canadians develop foodborne illness each year, of which 39,000 end up in the hospital and as many as 600 die. In addition to the considerable suffering by customers, food poisoning can result in lost customers and sales, loss of prestige and reputation, lawsuits, increased insurance premiums, lowered employee morale, and professional embarrassment. The cost to your establishment, as well as to the health care system is tremendous. The good news is that most foodborne illnesses can be prevented through proper hygiene and safe food handling techniques.

Below are some helpful tips and reminders:

- All food contact surfaces used in the preparation, service, display or storage of food should be cleaned, rinsed and sanitized after each use. Try to 'clean as you go'.
- After handling raw meat, poultry and seafood, always wash hands.
- Wash, rinse and sanitize: After use, equipment and utensils should be cleaned and sanitized in a 3-compartment sink which is deep enough to allow for complete immersion of the items to be washed.
 - 1) First, sort, scrape, and pre-rinse utensils.
 - 2) In the 1st compartment, wash utensils in clean hot water with an efficient detergent in concentrations recommended by the manufacturer. Change water frequently.
 - 3) In the 2nd compartment, rinse any remaining detergent and soil using clean hot water and changing water frequently.
 - 4) Sanitize using a basket or rack for immersion in the 3rd sink. Sanitize for 30 seconds to 2 minutes at a temperature of 77°-82°C.
- A manual dishwashing instruction card should be on permanent display above the dishwashing area.
- Special care should be directed to the cleaning of cutting and chopping boards and of meat slicers.
- Cloth towels can be a source of cross-contamination so use them sparingly. Use of disposable wipers or paper towels are preferable.
- Keep all food storage areas clean, cool, tidy and dry.
- Wipe cans over the tops prior to opening. Do not forget to clean the can opener.
- Give your entire kitchen a thorough 'spring clean' periodically.
- Empty garbage bins regularly, as they are an obvious breeding ground for germs.
- Do not forget to regularly clean ovens and grills by using a product designed for this specific purpose. This will allow you to preserve the good quality and taste of your food. It will also prevent deposits of baked-on carbon, which could be carcinogenic³ and harmful to your customers' health.

When cleaning, it is important to use the right materials for the job:

- Dishwashing detergents and liquids are designed to dissolve grease, oil and dirt.
- Disinfectants and sanitizers are designed to kill germs. These are powerful agents and should not be used indiscriminately.
- Anti-bacterial hand cleaners can also kill germs.
- Always clean surfaces first with detergent to remove any grease and dirt, then apply disinfectant or sanitizers to kill any remaining germs. A no rinse sanitizer is recommended due to its convenience and ease of use.

³ http://www.readersdigest.ca/mag/2005/07/food_that_harm.php

Cleaning products will not work effectively if not used properly. Therefore, it is important to read and follow their instructions. It is critical that your employees be trained quickly and easily to properly use any cleaning system that you choose. With so many different surfaces to disinfect in a restaurant (*i.e. counters, sinks, cutting boards, slicers, floors, tables, chairs, bathrooms and more*), a line of cleaning products that is illustrated with pictograms and colour-coded for different surfaces will help your employees quickly learn and provide them with a daily reminder of correct use. Wall charts can also be very effective. Seek a cleaning solution provider who offers training to your employees. This added benefit will provide you with the optimum use of the products purchased and allow you to focus your time and resources on other aspects of your business. A cleaning system that can be customized to fit your needs is ideal since it can go a long way in making your life simpler.

Hand Hygiene:

Frequent and proper handwashing is an essential part of good kitchen and personal hygiene. Some germs can stay alive on our hands for up to three hours. In that time, they can be spread to all the things we touch – including food and other people. The use of gloves does not eliminate the need for hand hygiene. Likewise, the use of hand hygiene does not eliminate the need of gloves. Gloves reduce hand contamination by 70 to 80 percent, prevent cross contamination and protect customers and employees from infection. However, gloves should be changed regularly.

Wash your hands regularly throughout the day, but especially at these times:

Before:

- Preparing food
- Eating
- Starting work; especially if you are a food handler or health professional

Between:

- Handling raw foods (meat, fish, poultry and eggs) and touching any other food or kitchen utensils

After:

- Handling raw foods, particularly meat, fish and poultry
- Going to the toilet
- Touching garbage/waste bins
- Coughing or sneezing, especially if you are sick

Although we all think we know how to wash our hands, many of us do not do it properly. Technique is just as important as frequency. Several key areas that we often miss are:

- The thumbs
- Between the fingers
- The palms of the hands
- The back of the hands
- Around the finger nails



- Areas most frequently missed during hand washing
- Less frequently missed
- Not missed

(Adapted from Taylor L (1978), An evaluation of hand-washing techniques - I, Nursing Times, 12 January, pp 54-55)

Get Clean

There are many resources that can help you achieve your cleanliness goals. For example, health inspectors, rather than posing a threat, can become a valuable source for suggestions and ways to improve your establishment. Be proud of your accomplishments and educate your customers by hanging food safety certificates in public view, as well as handwashing reminders. Customers are also an important resource and should be encouraged to report their observations and to make suggestions.

A clean restaurant will, by no means, guarantee success, but it will go a long way in preventing problems, moving you one step closer to reaching your goal. With one less thing to worry about, you can then focus on other areas of your business, such as menus, marketing, service, and the overall customer experience in order to achieve the level of success that you desire.

Source:

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