0015 The Summers Principle

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Every operating outcome in a restaurant — every Guest kept or lost, every cast member who stays or leaves, every dollar earned or extracted — exists due to one of two causes: design, or default.

That is the principle. One sentence. Every word carries weight.

Every operating outcome — not most outcomes, not typical outcomes, not the outcomes the operator was paying attention to. Every one. The Guest who left after their entrée and never came back. The cast member who gave notice on a Tuesday. The dollar of margin that walked out the back door in a comped meal nobody tracked. All of it. Every outcome the restaurant produces is a data point produced by the principle.

Exists due to — this is a causal claim, not a descriptive one. The principle does not say outcomes are correlated with design or default. It says outcomes are caused by them. Something happened. Something caused it to happen. The something that caused it is either design or default. There is no third cause inside the restaurant.

One of two causes — a binary. Not a spectrum. Not a continuum. The principle names two operating modes, and every outcome traces to one of them. Restaurants are messy in practice; any given shift has design running on some dimensions and default running on others. But at the level of a specific outcome, one mode produced it. Which mode is what the principle asks the operator to see.

Design — engineered intent. The operator decided what the outcome should be, built the conditions to produce it, and maintained those conditions long enough for the outcome to result. Design is not wishful thinking. Design is not hope. Design is the operator's choice, translated into a built condition, held over time. When an outcome is caused by design, the operator can trace the outcome back to the choice, the condition, and the maintenance.

Default — the absence of engineered intent. The operator did not decide what the outcome should be. Or the operator decided but did not build the conditions. Or the operator built the conditions but did not maintain them. In any of those cases, the outcome was produced by whatever forces

filled the space where the operator's design was supposed to be — the market, the cast's individual choices, the moment, the momentum of prior defaults, the accumulated drift of a system that was not being designed against.

Design produces outcomes the operator engineered. Default produces outcomes the operator did not choose but got anyway. Both are real. Both trace to the operator. One traces to their action. One traces to their absence.

There is no third cause. Not luck. Not fate. Not the industry. Not the market. Not the culture. Not the moment. All of those are conditions the operator either designed against or defaulted into. They are not independent causes of the outcome. They are the terrain across which design or default operates.

This is what makes the principle a governing law rather than an observation. If there were a third cause — if outcomes could just happen for reasons unrelated to the operator's design or default — then the principle would be one factor among many, competing with luck, competing with the market, competing with fate. It would be advice, not law. But there is no third cause. Every outcome traces. Which means the principle is not one factor. It is the only factor.

The operator's job is not to eliminate default. Default is inevitable for any dimension of the operation the operator has not yet designed against. Restaurants have hundreds of dimensions. No operator designs against all of them at the same intensity at the same time. The operator's job is to know which dimensions are being designed and which are being defaulted, and to shift the ratio deliberately toward more design over time.

Design is not perfection. Design is the presence of engineered intent, at whatever depth the operator's capacity currently supports. Default is not failure. Default is what happens when engineered intent is absent — sometimes because the operator has not yet built the capacity to design that dimension, sometimes because they have chosen to leave that dimension alone, sometimes because they never looked at that dimension at all. Different causes of default produce different flavors of default, but they are all default.

The principle stated simply: nothing in a restaurant happens by accident. Everything happens by design or by default. The operator's work is to know which and to shift the ratio.

Every fundamental below this one — Perspective, Product, People, Performance, Profit — is a domain in which the principle operates. Every entry in every fundamental is a specific application of the principle to a specific operating question. The principle sits at the top because the principle produces everything below it. F1 through F5 are five faces of the same law, operating at different

layers of the restaurant.

That is why F0 exists. Before the operator can engage the fundamentals, they have to accept the principle. Because if they do not accept it — if they still believe outcomes are exogenous, or that natural forces produce restaurant results, or that some third cause explains what they cannot design against — then the fundamentals will not land. The operator will study Perspective without designing Perspective. They will read Product without designing Product. They will hire People without designing People. They will track Performance without designing Performance. They will manage Profit without designing Profit. And the outcomes will confirm their belief that the fundamentals do not work — when in fact the operator was defaulting on the fundamentals while claiming to run them.

The principle has to land first. Then everything else works.

Where The Principle Shows Up In Operation

The principle governs from above. It resolves in operating time at two paired moments: [The Point Of Opportunity] (operator and cast side) and [Point Of Experience] (Guest and actor side). Every decision the principle governs lands at one or both of those points.