2060 The Decisions Before the Decisions

Product Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/2060-the-decisions-before-the-decisions/

There is a version of pre-opening that looks like work but isn't. The operator who spends three months arguing over tile samples, debating logo fonts, and touring kitchen equipment showrooms while they have no signed lease, no confirmed financing, and a concept that hasn't been validated against a single real Guest — that operator is busy. They are not building.

The energy flows toward what is tangible and exciting and away from what is hard and uncomfortable. That is human. It is also how operators arrive at opening day having made all the wrong decisions first.

Here is the sequence that actually matters.

You do not pick a site before you know your concept. You do not commit to a design before you have a site. You do not start building before you have your money. You do not hire before you have a business.

That sounds obvious. It is not how most people do it.

Concept work comes first — and real concept work, not daydreaming. At twelve months out you should be studying successful concepts, looking for gaps in your specific local market, and visiting restaurants — not to admire them, but to understand why certain places are busy and what exactly is driving it. The discipline is to separate what you personally like from what the market will support. Those are not the same question and operators who conflate them pay for it at the point of sale.

By month eleven you need preliminary food and bar menus and a defined price range — not final, but concrete enough to run real financial assumptions. By month ten you need a concept defined tightly enough to set facility requirements: how much space, how many seats, what kitchen configuration, what kind of parking. You cannot intelligently evaluate a site until you know these numbers. You cannot get to these numbers without a concept.

Before you build anything — a new menu section, a daypart program, a catering offering, a private dining room — write down what success looks like. Not the revenue target. What the Guest will say. What problem it solves for them. What would make it remarkable. What could disappoint

them. Four sentences. If you cannot write them before you start, you are not clear enough on what you are building to build it well.

The operator who skips this step moves fast in the wrong direction. They launch something the Guest does not care about, or care about the way the operator hoped. Then they spend the next six months trying to fix what should have been decided before the first dollar was committed. The extra hour of thinking at the front end is not slow. It is the only thing that makes everything after it faster.

The decision before the decision is always the same question: who is this for and why will it matter to them? If the answer is "everybody" or "it seemed like a good idea," the decision has not been made yet.

This is the chain. Break it early and everything that follows is guesswork dressed up as planning.