2080 Building the Operation Before the Building Is Done

Product Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/2080-building-the-operation-before-the-building-is-done/

The staff side of pre-opening gets treated as a late-stage activity by most operators. That is a significant mistake.

Your people are your product. The restaurant industry runs on one foundational truth that never changes regardless of concept, price point, or market: all cast members are volunteers. They can leave any time. They choose to work for you. The conditions you create in the pre-opening period — the clarity of expectations, the quality of development, the culture you are modeling — determine whether the people who were good enough to say yes in the first place decide to stay.

The staffing plan at month three should be explicit: determine how many people you need by position, then hire twenty percent more than that number. Not because you expect mediocrity — because you understand reality. Turnover during development, personal situations, no-shows on opening week, people who looked right in an interview and didn't hold up in practice. The twenty percent buffer is not pessimism. It is operational insurance against a near-certainty. Running short-staffed in your first thirty days compounds. Running with more people than you technically need is solvable.

Management hiring begins at month four. Their development materials — covering personnel management, operations, and administrative systems — get built at month three alongside the hourly position materials. These are not separate tracks. The managers are there to develop the hourly cast, and they need to be fluent in the standard before development begins.

The employee handbook is not an HR formality. It is the written articulation of your culture. It documents what you expect, what you will and will not tolerate, how decisions get made, and what the experience of working at your restaurant should feel like. When it is absent or thin, you get inconsistency — managers applying different standards, disputes with no reference point, Guests experiencing wildly different levels of Hospitality depending on which cast member they encounter. Get it right before you open.

Job descriptions belong in the same category. Every position needs one — not as a legal document, but as a performance standard. When a server or a kitchen manager understands

exactly what good looks like in their role, they can work toward it. When they don't, they are guessing, and you are evaluating against a standard that exists only in your head. That is not fair to them and it does not produce a consistent Guest experience.