3020 The Playing Field Has Changed

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3020-the-playing-field-has-changed/

Before we talk about specific hiring situations, you need to understand what you're hiring against.

For the first time in the history of this industry, you are not just competing with the restaurant down the street for hourly labor. You are competing with Amazon. With DoorDash. With Uber. With every remote-friendly employer who will let someone work from their couch, set their own hours, and never deal with a difficult Guest.

The gig economy didn't just create competition for restaurant labor — it fundamentally changed what the workforce expects work to feel like. Flexibility. Autonomy. No uniform. No manager within arm's reach. You can argue all day about whether that's better for a career than a structured shift — but the person choosing where to spend their labor doesn't care about your argument. They care about their options.

The post-2020 labor market crystallized something that had been building for years: restaurant work carries a perception problem. Long hours. Weekend and holiday requirements. Physical demands. An industry-wide reputation for high stress, low pay, and transient culture. Some of that reputation is earned. Some of it isn't. None of it matters to the person standing in front of an Amazon application unless you change the experience.

Here's what this means for you. There is no labor market to wait on. The market is what it is today, and that's the reality you manage in. If conditions shift, your tactics shift with them — that's appropriate. But your strategy doesn't change with the market. Build something worth choosing — over a warehouse shift, over driving for a platform, over whatever else is competing for that person's time — and you will be competitive in any labor environment you find yourself in.

Your operation either passes that test or it doesn't. The market will tell you which.

This is not an argument for lowering your hiring standard. It's the opposite. In a compressed labor pool with more competition for quality workers, the answer isn't to accept worse candidates — it's to build a place that attracts better ones. The standard holds. The work to build something worthy of it just got harder.

Header: The Sentence the Industry Won't Say

The phrase circulating in every labor-cost conversation right now is "better systems around fewer people." It sounds like discipline. It is not. It is subtraction dressed up as strategy — harvesting the gap between what the Guest expects and what a reduced crew can deliver, and betting that the systems will hold the standard the people no longer will.

The Road 2 sentence is structurally identical and never appears: better systems around better people. Better people compound. They produce more per hour, hold the standard without supervision, reduce the waste that comes from turnover, and build the Guest relationships that generate the return visits that fund everything else. Better systems amplify what better people can do. Fewer people just means less.

The industry does not say the second sentence because it requires investment — in selection, in development, in wages that hold people long enough for the compounding to show. The first sentence requires only a spreadsheet.

Build something worth choosing. Staff it with people worth keeping. That is the labor strategy. The rest is arithmetic.