3105 Training Is Broken

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3105-training-is-broken/

Every training manual I have ever seen — three-ring binders, digital portals, video libraries, laminated checklists taped to the walk-in door — has exactly the same problem. Not one of them, on its own, has ever turned a mediocre employee into a great one. Not once. Not ever.

Here's the part most operators have never considered: you're almost never actually training anyone to do something they've never done before. Your cast has greeted people. They've taken orders. They've carried plates. When was the last time anyone on your floor said "Wow, I've never greeted anyone before"?

What most operators call training is almost always standard-setting — defining how something already known gets done in your specific operation, for your specific Guests, at your specific standard.

The distinction matters. If you approach it like training, you'll explain the task. If you approach it like coaching, you'll build the habit. And habits are what show up when nobody's watching.

Training is not a document. It's not an onboarding checklist or a shadow shift or a video module your new hire watches on a laptop in the break room. Those things are inputs. What comes out the other side depends entirely on whether anyone is actually coaching.

Training, as it stands in most restaurants, is broken. It's transactional at best and completely irrelevant at worst.

And the cost of that brokenness compounds in ways most operators never track. Black Box Intelligence found that training costs represent roughly 35% of the total expense of replacing an hourly employee. For non-GM managers, that number climbs to 53%. For General Managers, 54%. More than half the cost of replacing a manager is the coaching investment you already made — and lost. Every time a coached manager walks, you're not just losing a person. You're losing the investment you made in that person, which you'll now make again in someone else, who will also leave if you don't fix the system that pushed the first one out.

The cycle compounds. A 2023 survey of 800 food service workers found that 90% had worked overtime, double shifts, or extra shifts in the prior year. Of those, 75% said they did so because of

a staff shortage. That's the loop: broken coaching leads to turnover, which leads to shortage, which leads to overtime, which leads to burnout, which leads to more turnover. The system feeds itself — and the manual on the walk-in door doesn't stop any of it.

Training an employee costs between seven hundred and twelve hundred dollars per person. That money is either an investment or a waste — and the difference is entirely up to you.

If you're spending it on a few days of shadowing, a binder nobody reads, and a hope the new hire figures it out — that's a waste. But if you're spending it on real coaching, daily one-on-ones, and a learning culture where development is ongoing — that's an investment. And like any good investment, you should expect a return.

The operators who treat training as a line item to be minimized are the same operators who can't figure out why their turnover is high and their service is inconsistent. You get what you invest in. If you invest nothing in your people's growth, don't be surprised when they give you nothing in return — or when they leave for someone who will.