3110 Four Bad Training Ideas and One Good One

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The hospitality industry chases training trends the same way it chases menu trends — with enthusiasm, without evidence, and usually at the operator's expense. Here are the four worst offenders I see operators wasting money on right now.

Gamification. Relationships and engagement are not games. When you gamify learning, your employees aren't getting excited about the learning — they're getting excited about the reward. They're chasing points, badges, and leaderboard positions, not understanding. The moment the game ends, the behavior ends with it. You haven't built anything. You've entertained people. That's not the same thing.

Replacing scripts with "suggestions." Canned is canned. Call it a script, a guideline, a suggestion, or a talk track — if the words aren't coming from a real human being who genuinely knows how to connect with other people, it doesn't matter how you package it. You can't script authenticity. You either hire for it or you don't have it.

Monetary rewards for ideas. Behavioral science has told us for decades that monetary rewards only create short-term behavioral changes. Employees have been telling us just as long that money isn't as big a motivator as we think it is. A fifty-dollar gift card doesn't create an engaged, purpose-driven cast member. It creates a moment. Moments fade. What lasts is meaning, growth, and belonging — none of which come with a price tag attached.

"Looking through the lens of the learner." This sounds profound in a conference breakout and means nothing on the floor. Don't give your people slogans. Give them your experience. Get on the stage with them. Show them, don't tell them. The best training that has ever happened in any restaurant I've been part of didn't come from a framework — it came from a leader who was willing to get their hands dirty alongside their team.

TBM Marketing Selling RBM Outcomes

When a vendor uses transactional marketing tactics to sell relational transformation, the medium is the message. The sales funnel, the vague testimonial, the 30-day promise, the free strategy session CTA — these are push marketing moves. If a service philosophy can be delivered through a sales funnel, it is not a philosophy. It is a product. The depth of the pitch tells you the depth of the product. The operator who confuses a bolted-on training engagement with a service system has not bought a system. They have bought a temporary tightening of a bolt that was never properly installed in the first place.

Bolted On vs. Built In

A real service system is not a 30-day engagement. It is built into hiring criteria, onboarding process, daily pre-shift, coaching methodology, Guest feedback loops, and accountability standards. The vendor who trains your team and leaves has not built anything. They have demonstrated what good looks like once, to a cast that will revert to the environment they operate in every other day of the year. The environment is the system. If the environment does not change — if the hiring, the coaching, the accountability, and the standards do not change — the training fades. Not because the cast forgot. Because nothing in the building reinforced it after the vendor left.

The one good idea isn't a training idea at all. It's a culture idea. We ask our cast to provide a high level of hospitality to our Guests — but we also ask them to do the same for the people they work with. That standard, applied consistently, does more for your operation than any training program ever designed. You'll find it in the next section.