3325 The Six Leadership Failures

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3325-the-six-leadership-failures/

I've held this position for more than four decades and I'm not moving off it. I've believed in bad systems, bad processes, bad training, and bad leaders — but bad employees? No. That's a cop-out. That's what operators say when they don't want to look in the mirror.

I hear it in every city I visit, in every restaurant I consult with: "You just can't find good people anymore." The complaint is universal. And it's almost always wrong.

Early in my career, an area director handed me what he called a hit list — people he wanted gone, yesterday, no discussion. I told him I'd make my own determination. I went back and looked at every single person on that list. I evaluated their role, their environment, their leadership, what they'd been given and what they hadn't.

Years later, every one of those people was not only still working — they'd been promoted into leadership roles in the same company or others. Before you put someone on a list, you better be certain you know whose list you actually belong on.

That area director didn't have a bad employee problem. He had a leadership problem. His own.

When I walk into a restaurant and see a team that isn't performing, I don't start by evaluating the team. I start by evaluating the leader. Because in my experience, underperforming cast members are almost always the product of one or more of these six leadership failures — and every single one of them is fixable, but only if you're willing to own them first.

One: Your hiring processes are broken. You're hiring based on the need for bodies, not talent. Your interviewing approach hasn't been updated in years. Your process is designed to confirm your biases rather than discover actual capability. If you're hiring anyone with a pulse because you're desperate, you are building a team destined to underperform. That's not their fault. That's yours.

Two: Your training is disconnected from reality. Your training processes are not grounded in actual experience. Instead, they're built on manuals full of policies, rules, and procedures that have nothing to do with creating peak performance. You hand a new hire a binder, have them shadow someone for two shifts, and call it training. Then you're surprised when they can't execute at the level you need. You gave them a manual. You didn't give them mastery.

Three: Your performance management is based on likability, not metrics. You evaluate people based on who you get along with, who shows up with a smile, who doesn't cause problems — rather than on actual performance standards. If your evaluation system doesn't measure real output against real benchmarks, you're not managing performance. You're managing feelings.

Four: Your managers can't coach and can't handle conflict. When your manager's ability to coach cast members — or to deal with conflict and poor performance — gets delegated to HR, you've already lost. HR doesn't run your restaurant. Your managers do. If they can't have a direct conversation with an underperformer, if they can't deliver honest feedback without it becoming a confrontation, you don't have a team problem. You have a leadership development problem.

Five: Your values are misaligned — and you hired them anyway. Your values as a business are not aligned with those of your cast members, but you hired them because you told yourself you could fix it later. You can't. Values aren't skills. You can train someone to run food properly. You cannot train someone to care. If their core values don't match what you're building, no amount of coaching will close that gap. The longer you wait to address it, the more damage they do to your culture.

Six: Your culture subsidizes mediocrity. You've built an environment that rewards conformity over performance. When your best people see that the lowest performers face no consequences — or worse, get the same recognition — they stop trying. A culture that tolerates mediocrity actively produces it. You're not just allowing underperformance. You're incentivizing it.

If you have an underperforming cast member, run through those six failures before you do anything else. Be brutally honest with yourself. Did you hire this person thoughtfully, or because you needed a body on the schedule? Did you train them to succeed, or hand them a manual and hope for the best? Have you given them clear, measurable performance standards? Does your manager actually know how to coach?

The operators who blame their teams are the ones who end up in the seventy-six percent — the ones who don't make it past year three. The operators who look inward first, who audit their own systems before pointing fingers, who take ownership of the team they built — those are the ones who survive. Those are the ones who thrive.

I reviewed a three-unit operation where one professional manager was responsible for the entire brand. Hourly managers — people who had been promoted by proximity, not by development — were running shifts at every location. They had no shift plans. No sales goals. No product features to present. No Guest engagement strategy. Their entire posture was reactive: deal with whatever

happens, then deal with the next thing that happens.

The staff had a negative image of being addressed by managers. Communication was poor. Morale was low. Nobody was having any fun — not the staff, not the managers, and certainly not the Guests.

Every one of those symptoms was a leadership problem. Not a people problem. The staff weren't broken. The process that was supposed to develop, support, and Coach them simply did not exist.

That operation no longer exists either.

Fix the system, and you'll be astonished at what the same people can accomplish.