3450 The Friction Trap People

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3450-the-friction-trap-people/

There's a version of the technology argument that sounds exactly right: technology should remove the friction that suffocates hospitality, freeing the cast to do what only humans can do — be present, make eye contact, make the Guest feel something.

That's the aspiration. It's correct.

Here's what's actually happening: technology is being deployed to remove both the friction and the human. And operators who don't understand the difference between removing friction and removing the cast member are making the problem worse while thinking they're solving it.

The QR code doesn't just remove the friction of the allergen question. It removes the cast member from the table entirely. The kiosk doesn't just streamline the order. It eliminates the interaction where a Guest gets a recommendation from someone who knows the menu and wants them to love it. The automated upselling prompt doesn't free the server to build a relationship. It replaces the moment where the relationship would have been built.

Friction-removal and relationship-removal are not the same thing. But in the hands of operators who are optimizing for efficiency over experience, they produce the same outcome: a technically functional dining room where the Guest feels processed.

What the Technology Should Actually Do

The cast member who is freed from repeating the same allergen answer twelve times per shift has more capacity for the cast member's actual job — reading the Guest, anticipating the need, building the connection that makes the experience worth coming back for.

That's the right version of friction-removal. Take the mechanical. Leave the human. Build systems that handle what can be systematized so that what can't be systematized — the genuine hospitality moment — gets the attention and energy it deserves.

The repeatable information delivery, the order routing, the inventory tracking, the reservation confirmation — those belong to systems. The eye contact, the read of the room, the moment that adds to [A Day In Their Life] — those belong to people.

Technology supports the GX when it gives the cast more capacity for the human work. It supplants the GX when it replaces the human work entirely.

The operators who understand this distinction build technology stacks that amplify human capacity. The operators who don't build efficient operations that nobody wants to come back to.

The Causality Problem

Here's where the friction argument gets it backwards: it assumes that once the mechanical is handled, the emotional naturally emerges.

It doesn't.

A cast member who doesn't have the intrinsic motivation to care about the Guest's experience won't suddenly develop it because the allergen question is automated. Emotional intelligence, genuine presence, and real hospitality aren't what's left over after the systems run. They're skills — and character traits — that have to be hired for, developed, and modeled by the operator before any technology touches them.

Systems don't release human capacity. Leadership builds it.

This is why the technology chapter comes after the People chapter. You can't automate your way to a hospitality culture. You build the culture first — hire for the intrinsic, develop the cast, lead the environment — and then you build the systems that support what those people are already capable of delivering.

Technology amplifies wherever you are. If the human foundation is solid, removing friction through technology makes the operation better. If the human foundation is absent, removing friction through technology produces a faster, more efficient version of the same empty experience.

The machine doesn't make the hospitality. The people do. The machine just gets out of their way.