3490 The Power Conflict

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3490-the-power-conflict/

Operator's Playbook | People arc — Conflict Audit cluster

Status: DRAFT

The operator controls the schedule. The section. The hours. The job. The cast member who speaks up risks all of those things — even if the operator never intends to retaliate.

Perceived risk is enough to silence most people.

This is the foundational conflict in every restaurant, and it runs underneath every other conflict on this list. The cast member who watches a manager make a bad decision and says nothing is not indifferent. They have done a quick calculation about what speaking up costs them and decided the price is too high. That calculation happens in seconds and it happens every day. The environment you have built — or failed to build — is the variable that changes the answer.

There is a difference between promised safety and demonstrated safety. Promised safety is the operator who says "my door is always open" and then gets visibly annoyed when someone walks through it with a problem. Demonstrated safety is the operator who, when a cast member brings a difficult observation, responds with curiosity instead of defensiveness — and does it consistently enough that the cast believes it will happen again.

You cannot promise your way to a culture where people speak up. You have to demonstrate it, repeatedly, at cost to yourself, until the cast believes it is real.

The operator's role in the Power Conflict is not to eliminate the power differential — that is not possible. It is to manage it with enough emotional maturity that the people in the room do not spend their energy protecting themselves from you instead of running the operation.

Emotional maturity is required on both sides. The cast member who raises a concern and then escalates to aggression when it is not immediately resolved is not raising a concern — they are making a demand. The operator gets to expect professionalism in how conflict is raised. The cast member gets to expect safety in raising it. Both expectations are legitimate. Both require modeling.

Model it first. The cast will follow what they see, not what they are told.