3595 Scheduling Is a Leadership Decision

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3595-scheduling-is-a-leadership-decision/

Most operators schedule for coverage. They look at the week, figure out where the gaps are, and fill them. The schedule is a logistics problem.

That's the wrong frame entirely.

Scheduling is a leadership decision. Every choice you make about when your people work sends a message about how much you value their life outside your building. And your cast is reading that message every single week.

Two days off in a row. Not Wednesday and Saturday. Two consecutive days. One day off isn't a break — it's a pause. You can't recharge, spend time with your family, handle your life, or come back with anything left to give on a single day between doubles. Two consecutive days off is the difference between a cast member who recovers and comes back with something to give, and one who is perpetually depleted and eventually leaves because they can't sustain the pace.

The schedule communicates your values before you say a word. The operator who consistently schedules their best people on the worst shifts, who splits days off to maximize coverage without considering the human cost, who treats the schedule as a puzzle to be solved rather than a statement to be made — that operator is telling their cast exactly what they think of them. The cast is listening.

A 2023 survey of 800 food service workers found that 56% feel burned out — and 58% report being happy or extremely happy with their work. Both are true at the same time. Your people aren't miserable. They love Hospitality. What they can't survive is the operational dysfunction they're being asked to absorb. The burnout isn't coming from the job. It's coming from broken systems, short staffing, and leaders who aren't leading.

When you're short-staffed, the impulse is to schedule your best people more. That's the short-term move. The long-term move is to create conditions where people choose to stay — which means treating their time as valuable, their rest as necessary, and their life outside the building as worth protecting.

Schedule the people. Not just the shifts.

The schedule built against sales revenue is built against the wrong number. Revenue shifts with menu price increases, with daypart check average variation, with the slow Tuesday that happened to have one large party. Transaction volume — covers served, tickets run, Guests through the door — is the stable number. Schedule against what you expect to serve, not against what you expect to collect. The operator who builds labor models against revenue will always be chasing a number that can move for reasons that have nothing to do with how busy the floor actually was.

There's a simple test for every late-night daypart: compare your hourly gross profit — sales minus cost of goods for that hour — against your hourly labor cost. If gross profit is less than labor cost, you are paying to stay open. That is not a rounding error or a slow week. That is a structural decision about your hours of operation that you are making by default instead of by design. Run the math by daypart. Then decide what you actually want to do.

Cross-fundamental note: connects to 3.X — The Five Ways They Leave (financial growth failure and the sense of mattering both show up in scheduling decisions before they show up in exit interviews) and 4.X — Build the Floor, Don't Fill It (the pre-shift scheduling discipline is the operational expression of the same principle — talent deployment, not slot coverage).