3635 The External Network

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3635-the-external-network/

Every independent operator needs a professional network. Not a list of people they could call in an emergency. A network of professionals they already know — who already know them, who already know their business — and who are genuinely accessible when the moment requires it.

The distinction matters. There is a fundamental difference between having an attorney's name in a drawer and having a relationship with an attorney who has read your lease, knows your entity structure, and picks up when you call. The drawer version gives you a starting point in a crisis. The relationship version gives you an answer before the crisis becomes one.

Build the network before you need it. An operator who assembles their professional support team in response to a problem has already paid a premium — in time, in the cost of getting someone current on a situation that has already deteriorated, and in the decisions made in the absence of counsel they hadn't yet secured.

The professionals every serious independent operator should have an active relationship with:

A restaurant attorney. Not a general practice lawyer who handles restaurant matters occasionally. Someone who knows the industry, understands lease structure, and whose advice is calibrated to the realities of this business.

A CPA or accountant with restaurant experience. Someone who understands the P&L structure, the tax implications specific to this industry, and who is looking at your numbers regularly enough to catch what you can't see.

A banker or lender relationship. Built before you need capital. The operator who walks into a bank as a stranger when they need a line of credit is in a structurally weaker position than the one whose banker already knows the business and has a basis for trust before the ask.

An insurance professional who understands hospitality. Coverage gaps in this industry are expensive to discover. The right professional finds them before they cost you.

A restaurant coach or advisor. Someone who has actually done what you are doing and can tell you the truth about what they see in your operation. Theory is not the credential. The work is.

None of these relationships require a retainer. All of them require the investment of building the relationship before it is needed, so that when it is needed, the relationship is already there.

Paid professionals are not an expense. They are the single most efficient use of capital available to an independent operator who understands what it costs to operate without them.

The operators who tell me they can't afford the professional network are almost always the ones spending the most on the problems it would have prevented. The lease dispute that costs forty thousand dollars to resolve would have cost four hundred to review before it was signed. The tax exposure discovered in year three would have been caught in year one by an accountant who was actually engaged. The math on professional investment is not close.