3640 The Bench Comes First

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3640-the-bench-comes-first/

When an operator decides to expand, the conversation almost always starts in the wrong place. Finance. Real estate. Product sourcing. Build-out timelines.

You start with your bench.

Before a single lease is signed, before a single dollar of expansion capital is committed, the operator who is serious about growth has one question to answer: do I have the people to do this?

Not the people you have today. The people you need — to run your first location at standard while you are not there, and to lead your second location from the first day of service. Both. Simultaneously. Without a drop in Guest experience at either.

If the answer is no — or not yet — the timeline for expansion is not set by the real estate market or the financing window. It is set by how long it takes to develop the leaders you need. That is the real clock.

Most operators who expand too quickly aren't undercapitalized in dollars. They are undercapitalized in talent. They borrowed against their financial position without building their leadership position.

Deepen the bench before you need it. That means developing leaders who aren't ready yet — not waiting for people to become ready on their own. It means promoting deliberately, coaching aggressively, and creating stretch opportunities inside your first location long before the second one exists.

The time to build the bench is eighteen months before you start looking. Not when the lease is signed. Not when a good space becomes available. Eighteen months before you start looking.

The bench you need as a growing operator is deeper than anything a single-unit operator has ever had to build. At one location, you need enough leadership coverage to run your shifts. The moment you commit to a second location, that number changes — because you are about to pull from that bench, and what remains still has to run your first location at full standard. Then when the third location comes, you draw again.

The operators who grow successfully have been over-developing their talent for years before they needed it. They built a bench for a business that was bigger than the one they had. That foresight is not an accident. It is a strategy.

If you've never developed a leader internally, you don't have a development infrastructure to build from. That's real, and pretending otherwise doesn't help you. Start smaller than you think you need to. Find one person worth investing in. Fifteen minutes a day, consistently, over sixty days. That's the first version of an internal pipeline — not a training academy, not a formal program. One person, one developer, one relationship. The infrastructure grows from there. If you wait until you have the infrastructure to start, you never start.