

# Building a Stronger Team to Drive Sales

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## Hiring and Training Techniques that Boost the Bottom Line



### Form a Team Focused on Service and Sales

Although the economy is challenging, operators have control over who they hire and how they train. By bringing natural sales people onto the team and training on a variety of selling techniques, it is possible to win more sales and provide solid customer service.

Sysco has reviewed articles from leaders in the foodservice industry on approaches to hiring, training, and sales. The collective wisdom of these experts has been distilled to provide actionable advice.

## The Opportunity

Every operator is well aware of the challenges for the foodservice industry today. Food prices are volatile, traffic has been affected by low consumer confidence, and passing higher costs on to customers is a risky proposition. Despite this tough environment, one of the most important steps that operators can take is to build a strong team that drives sales.

## Hire the Right People

Building a strong team begins with finding and hiring the right people. As a part of the interview process, seek out servers, greeters, and bartenders who are natural sales people. These are the team members who will make it easier to create customer loyalty and grow your operation's sales. Consider using the following interviewing techniques that have been proven to identify better candidates.

When screening potential employees, look for four characteristics that are common to great foodservice staff members:

- **An outgoing, extroverted personality.** Extroverts tend to be people-oriented and have great social skills. Outgoing team members will connect with customers and work well with peers.



- **A sense of pride about work.** Employees who have pride in their work strive to do their job in the best

way possible. They view their work as important and will perform well, whether or not a manager or co-worker is observing their efforts.

- **Responsibility & dependability.** The best team members are those who feel responsible for the commitments they have made. These employees are dependable and feel that they have a duty to be productive while on the job.
- **High energy levels.** The foodservice environment is fast-paced and high pressure. People with high energy tend to work well in stressful situations. They are also likely to be highly productive and accurate in their tasks.

A set of well-designed interview questions is the best way to assess whether a candidate possesses the traits needed. An effective interview technique for assessing whether or not a person is extroverted is to simply ask them to tell you about themselves. Look for eye contact, a smiling expression, and expressive, enthusiastic descriptions of past work experiences, accomplishments, or hobbies.

Since the bottom line is so crucial in foodservice, it can be telling to ask whether a potential employee knows how much profit is left for every dollar of sales after all the expenses are paid in a typical restaurant. A realistic response, such as five cents on the dollar, indicates that the candidate understands the industry's low margins. Your future team members need to understand how critical their role will be to drive sales and profits to your operation.

Because customer orientation is critical for "front of the house" staff, be sure to ask questions like, "Do you enjoy serving others?" or "What's the most important job in any restaurant?" Strong candidates will mention the importance of taking care of the customer. It may be useful to ask for specific examples of when the interviewee took care of someone else and how they felt after the experience.

## Train Staff to be Consultative Sellers

Once you have a staff with sales skills in place, the next step is to train them on your value proposition and selling your food and drink offerings. First, it is important to educate the team about why it is crucial to sell. By creating a unique customer experience they will ultimately increase their sales and tips. The entire staff should understand how profits are made in foodservice and how the survival of the business depends on their efforts.

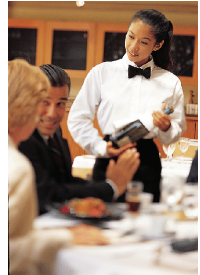
Employees who receive training have greater confidence in their abilities. This confidence then translates to greater sales. There are a variety of training techniques that will help teams become more effective consultative sellers.

Training for all new staff members should start with an orientation. During new hire training, employees must learn the responsibilities of their job from beginning to end. Key elements of training include:

- **Value Proposition Training.** Educate all staff members on your operation's value proposition. What is unique about your operation? What sets you apart?
- **Menu Training.** This should be highly interactive, with new staff tasting different dishes and observing how they are presented. Employees should be tested on their knowledge, possibly through fun games like "Menu Jeopardy" and also through written exams. Your staff needs to know how all items on the menu taste and are presented. Savvy diners often ask what's

great or different on the menu. Your team needs to take that cue and create an unforgettable dining experience

- **Bar Training.** This is similar to menu training, but without the tasting! Team members must understand the core drink descriptions and recipes for the house specialties. Essential knowledge includes wine basics, drink ordering, and serving procedures. Contact your Sysco MA to learn about our beverage calculator. This tool can help you understand how to grow sales simply by offering beverages that have high margins such as signature cocktails, soda, bottled water, etc.



- **POS Training.** During orientation, new employees may enter other servers' orders into the POS system as practice. Training should cover important processes like the server checkout procedure, handling voids, or entering coupons. Your POS machine needs to work as an extension of your server and kitchen. Timing of when orders are placed and then delivered to the table needs to be perfectly timed.
- **Real World Practice.** It is common for new hires to follow a trainer through each step of service (service-follow shifts), learning all aspects of the dining experience. Once a trainee has followed the trainer, then he or she should handle all the service steps under observation (in service-practice shifts). Your trainee needs to create a repeatable customer experience that does not vary during busy or slow shifts.

Importantly, training shouldn't stop after the orientation; ongoing training is critical. Group training is a great way to educate employees on approaches for suggestive selling. Servers may engage in role-playing and demonstrate how they would sell menu items and

specials to a particular customer. Your Chef and kitchen staff needs to help your wait staff “paint the picture” for the customer. Hosts and bartenders should also be included in these exercises. Their recommendations on drinks, desserts, and specials can influence your guests’ purchasing patterns and supports your value proposition.

Also, because diet and food trends are constantly changing, operators should consistently train their employees about consumer trends and how to respond to their needs. Questions about food allergies, healthy menu choices and portion size should be part of your wait team’s selling approach. By asking these important questions they will connect with your customers at a higher and more personal level. This will translate into higher sales, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### **Train Every Day with Pre-Shift Meetings**

Pre-shift meetings ensure consistency of service and provide an ideal opportunity for continuous training. There are a variety of ways that sales can be promoted through the pre-shift meeting. At the lineup, the chef may offer tastings and the servers can develop enticing descriptions that will engage customers. Alternatively, the staff may share selling tips and demonstrate through role-playing how these techniques work.

It is important to acknowledge and reward servers with strong sales skills. For maximum effect, positive feedback should be given either at the beginning or end of the pre-shift meeting. When offering feedback, be specific about what an employee did well. This approach provides meaningful praise to the team member and educates the rest of the staff about what types of behaviors are valued.

Since servers, hosts, and bartenders are on the frontlines of the business, they should be encouraged to provide feedback to management at the pre-shift meetings. Training is a two-way street. The staff often

has important observations and suggestions about how to improve sales, service, food, or operations.



Pre shift meetings are a necessity in today’s industry. They give you an opportunity to get your team focused for the task at hand. Much like a coach does with his team before the big game, you are giving them direction and guidance for the shift. Pre shift meetings should also be used to pump up the staff. Instead of taking those ten precious minutes before the shift to harp on all the negatives, find a way to put a positive spin on it! Recognize those employees that are performing and exceeding your expectations. This is your opportunity to focus your employees and make sure they are heading in your desired direction! Get your team involved with the meeting. Consider having a shift leader present the topics, or have each member of the staff describe their favorite menu item to the group. The more knowledge you arm them with before the shift, the better they will perform!

## Think Creatively About Ways the Team Can Sell

Because margins are razor-thin, it's critical to think creatively about different ways the team can sell. A common adage is that you can't manage what you don't measure. Why not set specific sales goals for each shift? Each server should understand how many beverages, sides, entrees, and desserts they need to sell to reach the goal. To make the challenge more interesting, consider fun sales contests each shift.



Operators and staff should not underestimate the power of connecting with kids. Providing a child-friendly dining environment can be a powerful way to promote repeat visits. Parents appreciate servers who take an interest in their children. This may be as simple as bringing a youngster a snack to nibble on before the meals are served, or crayons and something to color on as the parents get settled. Many times a family decides where to dine based on their kids preferences. A happy child creates a more pleasurable dining experience. Make sure your team acknowledges the importance of making your operation kid friendly.

### Sysco Can Help

As you work to build a stronger sales-focused team, Sysco can help.

- **Marketing Associate support.** Marketing Associates are valuable resources in helping operators think through staffing plans and selling strategies. MAs can share information on trends they are seeing, share tips and techniques on staffing, measuring and encouraging creative ways to sell. Enlist their help!
- **Business Reviews.** Through regular business reviews, Sysco experts can help you refine your value proposition and identify the best ways to execute it.

- **iCare Partners.** Sysco has formed relationships with several leading marketing services companies that can help operators cultivate great employee teams. Relevant iCare partners include:

- **Hcareers.** Building a strong team begins with finding and hiring the right people. Hcareers is the leading hospitality job board and offers a variety of products that will help you with your recruitment needs.
- **Insight Guest Relationships Management (GRM).** Insight GRM provides a guest feedback management service that allows you to gather valuable insight on what your customers think of your service. Use the customer feedback to evaluate and reward top performing employees for a job well done.
- **Red Book Solutions.** Red Book Solutions provides tools and training that help staff sell more effectively and improve business performance.
- **Sullivision.** Sullivision offers training tools that build sales, energize service, drive more customer traffic, and retain high performing employees.
- **Digital Dining.** Digital Dining's point-of-sale (POS) hardware, software and operational applications can boost your business by increasing customer satisfaction, speed-of-service, staff productivity, management awareness, kitchen production, and bottom-line profit.



- **MICROS Systems.** MICROS POS systems and information management solutions are designed to track all aspects of a restaurant's business, from sales to labor hours and inventory levels.

Information on the SYSCO iCare program and on each iCare partner can be found at [www.syscoicare.com](http://www.syscoicare.com).