



The Business of Running Strategic Restaurants

By Tom Rutherford

Strategic planning isn't something you often hear about in restaurant management. However it is vital that restaurateurs and managers run their restaurants with precision and clarity to avoid unnecessary "noise", increase their turnover and retrospectively their profits and create a happier place to work and dine.

Working with restaurants, cafes, bars, clubs and hotels, I get to see the passion and ideas behind each establishment. What I bring is a new perspective – a big picture lens that allows me to provide objective advice based on years of experience.

What I often find missing in restaurants is a "leader", one to inspire the staff to achieve common goals such as a focus on turnover and its increase with effort and systems, enjoyment of the guests through the engagement of the staff members and consequently increases in tips, an interesting menu peppered with dishes that you wouldn't cook at home and customer service with big smiles. It is crucial that all restaurants define their goals, create systems and get everyone working in the same direction for the same reason.

What's the situation?

When starting a strategic planning process, the first thing to do is examine the current state of the restaurant. What are its strengths and weaknesses? Mapping out the restaurant is a good start. Then move on to the menus required for each area, the service processes (both back and front of house), how to motivate and mentor the staff, identifying various skill levels and where they are best deployed and of course what this will cost. Make sure you have a close look at these aspects before making changes.

Start with your team

It all starts with the staff. You can have the best systems in the world, but without engaged and informed staff, nothing is possible. At staff meetings I enjoy presenting an organisational map which shows their roles and how they interrelate. I then break these down into job descriptions so everyone is clear on where their job begins, ends and overlaps.

Once this has been done you can discuss what needs to be achieved to make things better. Where are the gaps? What are the issues? How can the food make people want people to come and eat it, which processes will be more efficient, how should I manage tips, and increase customer satisfaction? Involve your people!



Roll the sleeves up

Having the right systems and processes in place is vital for a restaurant to be efficient and effective in delivering a memorable and quality experience, enough to bring them back and tell others. It also allows supervisors to have the right tools in place to manage staff and oversee the process instead of getting involved in the nitty gritty. If managers can't see what is going on because they are too busy 'doing' they are unable to change or fix things.

I always start with the work flow – in the kitchen and on the floor, table numbering, where the machines/equipment are, etc. Then move on to safety, OH&S, food temperature checks, check lists for tasks to do throughout the day and sign off sheets for accountability. It is also important to develop easy to use order forms, rosters, roster costs versus turnover forecast tools, glossary of terms and specific items like cocktail/menu recipes and how to plate and serve food. I also write instructions on how to describe the food.

With one client we simply moved the menu board from behind the cash register to the entrance of the queue, which resulted in a 25% increase in sales. The customer knew what they wanted by the time they wanted to pay versus having to decide at the register, resulting in dramatically shorter queues times. Same amount of people, they just ordered more and quicker because they had time to make a decision.

The food

Next tackle the menus. They are the crucial part of the equation – the theme, the diversity, the taste, the process to cook and of course the cost.

At one cafe, the sandwiches were taking too long to make due to the large variety on offer. The queue was slow and people were getting annoyed. We restricted the sandwich offerings, increased the menu diversity, which not only reduced wastage and simplified ordering; it also reduced customer waiting time (complaints and whether they would even enter the queue!)

Events at your place

Having worked in the corporate events market for many years, I understand what event managers are looking for when they are sourcing new venues. Too often restaurants bring all the terms and conditions to the sales process, creating a stifling experience for the event managers purchase decision. Understanding their needs – which are very different from your usual customer – and then developing the right documentation could help build a very profitable arm of your business. Develop two sets of documents, the sales story of the event and experience and the T&C with milestone dates for decisions and payments.



The results

No strategic planning is complete without the owners and staff seeing tangible results and changes to the bottom line.

When a restaurant takes on the task of being a strategically thought-out business, the results are amazing.

Staff members discover job clarity which leads to greater job satisfaction. When they come to work they know what to do and that the structure will work – even on busy days. Your guests enjoy quicker service, better and more hygienic food, limited waiting and happier service (the smile factor). They also develop a strong relationship and trust with the restaurant which encourages them to return and refer friends and family.

For managers, life gets easier. There is less trouble shooting needed as it is easier to understand what each area is doing due to the documentation. And like in all businesses, it is much easier to manage happy and motivated staff.

For the owners there are many advantages; the main ones being the increased efficiency and control of products, people and costs. Growing turnover is a common result due to smoother practices, cost analysis tools and a renewed vigour and energy.

Fresh eyes bring new ideas

All restaurants need to be re-jigged, refocused and refreshed. Some will need it after six months, others two years. The dining public are discerning, educated and demand the best practice, prices and food. This requires restaurants, cafes, bars, clubs, hotels and tourism specific outlets to use sound business practices that encourage growth and innovation.

Especially in these challenging times, be on top of your game and be the restaurant business that expands. Get prepared and get ready for success.

Tom Rutherford, Director, **fnb**

Chef and Creative Director Tom Rutherford is an Australian icon in the restaurant and catering world. Recognised internationally for his innovation, avant-garde cuisine and mind blowing events, Tom brings to fnb a lifetime of culinary credibility.

Tom Rutherford brings a fresh, experienced and discerning eye to food and beverage management. Working alongside restaurateurs he brings a point of leadership and coordination transforming restaurants into successful businesses.

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