



Paul Mannerling with HIT Training Brigade

*How can restaurants fill in the skills gap and ensure their workforce remains committed and passionate about their businesses?*

*Editorial: Rosanna Spence*

What keeps your restaurant ticking over? Is it brand loyalty, a menu that's one step ahead of the trends, or striking interiors?

Look deeper. None of those aspects would exist at all if it weren't for the people that power everything. They are your constant source of natural energy, fuelling your restaurant from every conceivable angle.

Your workforce is your most valuable asset – which you probably already know – but its links to wider business performance and personal dining experience means everything to day-to-day operations.

The time has come to dispel the typical trend of hospitality's high employee turnover. To see sustainable results, your people require tailored investment specific to your business' needs.

After all, why would people consider a long-term career in an establishment that doesn't offer engaging opportunities to progress through the ranks and experience business success as a result of their role in operations?

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two times more likely to go out of business than those that do, it's important that operators find the right training programme to match the needs of their establishment and safeguard the future of their business," says Jill Whittaker, managing director of HIT Training. "Delivering specialist training for staff members isn't a one-off task; it's something that takes time and needs to be invested in to ensure that an establishment is running to its optimum."

Every restaurant operation has its own unique cogs that create an extraordinary service, and customers are crying out for a more personalised experience when they eat out – and what better way to satisfy this desire than to prepare your people to deliver this with the best approach possible.

**MADE TO MEASURE**

Beneficial training that will reap visible rewards long term requires a tailored approach. Any programme employed should fit your restaurant's ethos like a perfectly tailored suit. Utilising a blend of internal instruction and shadowing with an external provider can achieve a good balance.

"In-house staff who provide training may benefit from knowing the business inside out, but they won't necessarily have the tools or expertise needed to guarantee that staff members are receiving the best guidance that will not only enhance their skills, but also help to grow a business," says Whittaker.

Casual Dining Group's Italian brand Bella Italia teamed up with CPL Online to create bespoke training courses for its staff under the name 'Being Bella Hearted', which incorporated five online courses focusing on service culture and engagement – ultimately giving its workforce the chance to further embrace brand values and deliver them effectively to customers.

"94% of our employees had completed the courses in just six weeks, with the first employee doing so in the first 20 minutes of it going live", explains Dan Hallam, learning and development manager for the North at Bella Italia. "Response to the courses has been phenomenal and we have found employees are really open to change."

'Ciao Bella', 'Making Friends', 'Blessed by the Chef', 'Treat Time' and 'Ciao for Now' cover everything from making a first impression, building up a rapport with customers, understanding heritage and sharing product knowledge, making the experience a treat as well as stressing the importance of a cheerful and genuine goodbye.

"It was important to us to roll out the courses and see change happen before the busy Christmas period," adds Hallam. "Our employees have embraced it wholeheartedly, with over 90% pass rate so far, and we have rewarded restaurant teams along the way with trophies, certificates and even aprons."

Bella Italia employees working in the restaurants have noted the far-reaching effects of implementing a new training scheme, crediting the courses with building bonds between front- and back-of-house teams.

"Product knowledge is an important element of the programme and since completing the courses we have found both front-of-house and kitchen teams have turned to one another to learn more about products, whether it be dish ingredients or drinks heritage," states

Businesses that don't train are **TWO TIMES** more likely on average to go out of business than those that do

**41%**



of employees are more likely to leave a position within a year if they do not receive training

(Source: Research from UK Commission for Employment and Skills, via HIT Training)

Charlotte Cranswick, manager of Bella Italia in Cheshire Oaks. "Interaction is excellent and we always start our day now with, 'Are you feeling Bella Hearted?'"

Having readily available materials for staff to access is more likely to encourage them to retain information, too. This, in turn, ultimately grows their confidence and the effects can be passed on to the customers – the end beneficiaries of any training programme.

**MIND THE GAP**

If 2015 brought the skills gap to this industry's attention, let 2016 be the year to remedy the situation.

Much has been said publicly about the worrying lack of applications for chef positions in the restaurant sector, and although educational establishments face their own task to encourage more people to graduate with the required experience and qualifications, operators can address this head-on with the right options for existing employees.

"The next step is to identify a handful of main pathways and then map out some key milestones along the way that people could identify with in terms of their own career development," advises Steven Pike, managing director of HospitalityGEM. "You should then explore what training activities may help people to acquire the skills necessary to progress to each milestone. However, when doing this, make sure that what you do is aligned with your company culture and values, as this is what will really make you stand out and feel valued by the employee."

Driving value back into the workforce not

**All aboard the apprenticeship**

The value of apprenticeships has been widely debated in the media, but despite the opinion that many are too low paid and secure job prospects are weak, there are cases when the scheme works to the benefit of the operator and apprentice.

Bristol tapas restaurant Bravas is a family-run business with partner restaurant Bakers & Co also based in the city.

The operator has always been keen to safeguard staff retention, while offering opportunities to those who are willing to work for them. In this respect, the company took on two apprentices – one at each venue – and sought help from People 1st on the best scheme to pursue.

"We've seen two highly enthusiastic and able apprentices come through our doors to work in food preparation – Ashley Johnson in our first site, Bravas, and Samantha Rides, our apprentice at Bakers & Co," explains Imogen Waite, co-founder of the two restaurants. "Ashley has been with us for two years, progressing from an apprentice to a full-time Bravas chef de partie. She is an extremely reliable and popular member of the team. Samantha, our apprentice commis chef at Bakers & Co, also has a very mature attitude and is an indispensable part of the team with impeccable drive and focus."

"We first heard about the apprenticeship scheme through a tutor at a local college and spoke to People 1st to see which scheme was right for us. The opportunity sounded like one we couldn't pass up, so we decided to give it a go. It's one of the smartest business decisions we've made. It's been so successful that we've decided to enroll an existing member of the Bravas team on an apprenticeship scheme to develop his skill set and knowledge."





Tablet training  
CPL Training in action at  
Bella Italia

only makes the day-to-day environment more appealing to those choosing hospitality as a career, but it can also aid staff retention in the long run. Bespoke career progression and continued support will inevitably make each person feel valued by your restaurant.

Speaking of skills, the added pressure on operators to compete with all-day offerings from other venues on the high street has seen extended drinks menus and more products introduced that often require more specific training – like breakfast pastry menus and hot drinks. Restaurants are facing stiff competition from coffee shops and customers expect knowledgeable staff delivering faultless cups to waiting tables.

"It's not enough for baristas to only know the basics of how machines and grinders work," explains Adrian Maxwell, managing director of Fracino. "They are expected to be knowledgeable on the harvesting, roasting and blending processes, the various types of milk, know the difference between conical and flat burrs in grinders – and be adept at latte art, to ensure coffee is visually stunning as well as tasting fantastic.

"Creating speciality coffee requires an absolute minimum of one day's training at basic level – with follow-up training at regular intervals. It's essential that trainees can judge the freshness of the coffee, grind it properly, understand the machines' intricacies and have the recipes and techniques to texture milk."

When looking at specialist skills, it's vital that staff across the workforce are of a similar level – people expect consistent products to be served on multiple occasions.

#### REACH HIRE

You could invest all your resources into training up restaurant teams across the country, but there will inevitably come a time that your business needs to hire some fresh blood to help support old hands.

Easier said than done, right? Despite all this talk of skills gaps and chef shortages, there are many roles in restaurants that attract more than a manageable amount of applications.

"When an operator is lucky enough to be in the position of receiving dozens or even hundreds of applications for a single role, setting bare minimum requirements that a candidate must meet can be a

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good way to quickly sort through the pile of CVs relatively quickly," comments Gayle Johnstone, sales and business development manager at Tennent's Training Academy. "Though operators should bear in mind that, for entry level positions especially, attitude and other intangibles are often as or more important than experience or training."

The 'X Factor' isn't only reserved for questionable primetime televised talent shows; employers across the UK are seeking people to power their business with more than just acceptable serving skills. Casual dining demands a friendly, relaxed experience with knowledgeable staff who deliver a memorable service, with an added extra quirk to catch the attention of diners. What will you be looking for to make your food and service stand out? ●

#### Level up

There are various ways in which employees can add value to their own CVs by keeping on top of the options provided by associations and institutions to further their knowledge.

"The Certified Food Service Professional (CFSP) accreditation programme is for everyone working in the catering industry who is looking to raise their level of professionalism," explains Simon Frost, chair of CESA. "It's unique in delivering a complete overview of how foodservice businesses operate, and the equipment used, it gives individuals an holistic understanding of every area of operation – from delivery to kitchen to front-of-house."

Making your staff aware of these options and providing routes for them to access materials is paramount to their career development.