

DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

By David Rothschild

Good restaurant managers are in the dining room ("on the floor," as it's known) as much as possible. They touch tables and "schmooze" the guests. They monitor service with a trained eye and note where actions need to be taken or staff has erred in some way. When something needs correcting, they pull the server aside and quietly, calmly explain how a certain procedure should've been performed. They do it away from other servers and out of earshot of guests.

Most experienced managers/supervisors are really good at this part of the job. But are we as good at "catching" our staff members doing something especially well? Do we praise them for their efforts? Do we thank them when we see them going above and beyond their job descriptions for the benefit of the guests — or co-workers? Do we reward them for their civic activity and community service outside of work that reflects well on them as our employees as well as on the restaurant itself?

Does your restaurant have an acknowledgement and rewards policy? Most restaurants have some written criteria in place, spelling out the means of recognition and the actions and behaviors you wish to reinforce and see repeated by others. If you don't have a clear-cut program, now's a perfect time to develop one.

How are employees nominated for awards in your restaurant? In most places, it's a popularity contest or a matter of seniority or longevity. The manager or supervisor typically makes the nomination. If you're there long enough, you're bound to win it at some

point. Many restaurants have decided to include the employees in the nominating process. It's always a good idea to listen to those in the trenches. A manager's or supervisor's perspective of an employee may be totally different than the way they're viewed by their peers.

A friend who works at a Phoenix-area upscale steakhouse shared this story: The restaurant was sponsoring an all-expenses-paid trip for eight employees, plus two supervisors, to see the Arizona Diamondbacks play the San Diego Padres in San Diego. The trip included airfare, dinner at the sister restaurant in San Diego and box seats for the game. Instead of the supervisors selecting the staff members, they added a twist — the back-of-house staff nominated four front-of-house employees and front staff nominated the kitchen crew winners. I'd be willing to bet that the choices would have been different if the managers had made the selections.

I remember, early on in my career, receiving a handwritten thank-you note from the general manager of the resort property where I worked. The note congratulated me for being chosen as the employee-of-the-month. In a ceremony at the next managers' meeting, my framed photo would be hung on the wall alongside those of previous employees-of-the-month. My picture and a short article would be in the next issue of the employee newsletter. Also included was dinner for two in my choice of the resorts' restaurants. To this day, I look back on that gesture with pride and affection. I felt special. It touched me. I believed then, as I do now, that the recognition was given with sin-

cerity and thoughtfulness.

When I was a high school culinary arts teacher, our department always had an end-of-year awards ceremony. To make it special, we asked that the principal be in attendance and be the primary presenter of the awards. A commendation just seems to mean more when it comes from the "big boss." Many of our casino clients also hold year-end awards dinners where all award winners from throughout the course of the year are honored. Each award-winner is encouraged to invite a guest. Many general managers ask that the recipients and their guests dress up for the occasion. It helps to make it even more special and memorable.

At their awards dinner, one resort has the employees draw a gift from a large box. Items range from fast food gift cards to weekend stays at associated properties, some in other states. This is in addition to the gift they might have already received as employee-of-the-month. Some restaurants have cash awards for meeting specific goals or objectives. Many give gift certificates to malls or online stores. Others reward stellar employees with gifts of tickets to cultural or sporting events. Some casino properties are giving "experience" certificates and prizes. A manager who really knows his staff can personalize these gifts. They might be lessons in tennis, skiing, scuba diving or racecar driving. They could be for spa treatments or meditation retreats.

We know restaurateurs who reward their entire staffs at the end of a successful season. One chef I worked for in Phoenix hired a bus and took the entire team — front- and back-of-house — to a restaurant in Tucson. It was his way of saying thank you for a job well done. An ulterior motive might have been for us to observe and learn from this award-winning restaurant and staff.

Another chef we know closes her restaurant for a month each summer and takes her entire staff to her home in Mexico for several

days during that time, to celebrate the end of a season. In this case, it also reinforces the culture and food that she exemplifies in her restaurant. The chef uses this time to research new sources of foodstuffs and recipes and reconnects with her staff and her heritage.

We've even known restaurant managers who rewarded their staff for the great job they did in training before a restaurant was open. Many years ago, a Louisiana property we worked with took the whole group on a "culinary expedition" to Houston so they could experience the caliber of fine dining they'd be expected to provide in their restaurant. Talk about getting started off with a bang!

Our employees are important to the success of our operation. Be sure to reward them periodically and praise them on a daily basis. Even if it's only, "Hey, great job!" You'll be surprised at what an enormous difference even a few words of recognition can make. **NAC**

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