

Stubborn Staff

An unenthusiastic work force might be the occasion for some soul-searching about how you develop new ideas.

Dear Arlene: I own a very large restaurant that is six months old. While business is building slowly, I realize that I need to be more proactive in developing reasons for the community to patronize me.

I have a marketing budget and even some cool ideas. However, I cannot get my staff to get excited or support these initiatives. The manager always finds some reason why we can't, instead of asking how we can, make this work. What can I do? –Georgio, Boston

Dear Georgio: Bravo for realizing that you need to market proactively. While I do not know the “cool ideas” you have, I’m sure that most of them will work with the proper effort and execution. Even so, you must continue to move forward to build the business.

First, I would ask myself, “Why won’t the staff play?” Are they burnt out? Does your marketing idea involve more work or more hours for them? Do the new programs take a point of departure from the original marketing strategy? Are they insecure about their positions or their abilities to carry out the plan? Do they believe in you?

If they are already overworked, and your plan is adding more work and hours without due compensation, no matter how good the idea, they will not support it. What is their payback for supporting the program? Have you built in any incentives?

THEY DON'T LIKE IT

If the new program changes the market position either too high up or too far down the original segment scale (quick serve to sit down, or fine dining to casual dining), they may not want to work in the new environment.

A fine dining manager who usually wears a suit and

is now asked to wear jeans to appear more casual will be very uncomfortable in his new role. A casual dining manager now asked to wear a suit and tie will have the same resistance.

The Peter Principle should also be considered. Maybe the ideas and programs you want to launch have your staff feeling insecure about their abilities to carry them out successfully.

A chef may be challenged with new menus and kitchen execution; a general manager may be asked to upgrade his knowledge of wine; a hostess may be asked get a new wardrobe and learn new phone etiquette; and a dining room manager may need to turn tables quickly instead of working at a more leisurely pace to which he is accustomed.

These changes in the current life of the staff could create panic and confusion – and ultimately result in the resistance you are now experiencing.

WHOSE IDEAS?

It sounds to me that the ideas you have shared with your staff were developed without their input. Have you allowed them to be part of the planning process?

Have you listened to and tried out any of their ideas? It’s human nature to support one’s own idea.

After doing some soul searching you may find that it is your leadership style that may need improvement. Perhaps you need to be more positive, evangelical or motivational. Perhaps you need to make a better case.

But for sure, if the staff will not play, it may be time to change the players. Good luck. ☺

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