



How to Be a Better Boss

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Essential Leadership Skills for Restaurant Owners and Managers

By Barry Shuster

If your operation is typical of many independent concepts, your biggest post-Covid challenge has been staffing. While the service labor shortage appears to be easing, there is no turning back on the higher wages required to attract and retain staff. With the cost of labor increasing at a time when you are fighting for margin points, developing your management team's leadership capacity is more important than ever.

Managers Versus Leaders

Managers require people to act and perform in a certain way through direction and, unfortunately, intimidation. Leaders try to influence people through inspiration, getting them to want to perform at a higher level. "When I operated my own restaurant and had very little cash flow, I knew I had to be creative with rewarding and retaining my staff in a creative, low-cost

manner," says veteran restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. "So when I hired them, I asked them to create a 'wish list' of things they wanted in three tiers: \$50, \$100, \$150. I kept each wish list in the employee's personal files. Some of the 'wishes' were movie tickets, sneakers, dinner out, flowers, days off, attendance at a trade show; and even additional 'free' uniforms."

As the employers were "caught in the act of doing something special," or after a particularly successful week or month, Spiegel would go into the "wish list" files and grant their personal wishes. "Of course, each gift matched the relevant tier in dollar amount (and came with) a personal, handwritten note from me. As it turns out, after years of keeping in touch with former staff, the personal notes had the most sustainable value." ●

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