



RESTAURANT SCHEDULING FOR SUCCESS- FROM E-BOOK "HOW TO IMPROVE DINING ROOM SERVICE"

This Tip will Help Maintain the Staff Schedule Keeping the Dining Room Service Staff Tight and Content which is Essential for Pleasing Paying Guests.

Staff scheduling is closely tied to dining room customer service and crucial for keeping your staff tight, happy and well connected. In every way, a balance must be achieved by matching the dining room service labor needs to forecasted business.

There should be a system whereby the staff shift availability days can be communicated in writing to the person who makes up the schedule. A simple staff shift availability sign-up sheet posted conspicuously will do. There was a schedule maker from one of my past restaurants who asked for shift requests on little pieces of paper. The main point is that constant communication with the staff while staying abreast of their available work shifts will facilitate the scheduling process immensely.

Each staff member should work a balanced amount of shifts throughout the week. If the schedule maker is burning out staff members with extra shifts or scheduling too many staff members to work only 1 or 2 shifts, it will subtract from customer service. Usually, a restaurant will get more efficiency from staff members working 3, 4, or more shifts per week rather than only 1 or 2 shifts per week. Though at times, one may have to bend this guideline to keep the work schedule filled, but it should be kept to a minimum.

The person who makes the schedule should be highly aware of the projected business in the restaurant. The schedule should contain the correct amount of labor needed to provide a proper level of service for each work shift. Seasonal aspects, (e.g. busy holidays/slow summers), special occasions, private parties etc. must be figured into the schedule. Any outside activity that may affect business in the restaurant such as food festivals, parades etc. needs to be taken into account. If there are separate dining rooms, the busy times must be properly forecasted for each room especially if one dining room is more popular such as showing off a special type of décor or providing entertainment on certain nights. If there is outdoor seating, the weather should be watched closely for it can change quickly.

Forecasting helps to schedule the correct amount of staff with the perfect balance always being sought. If there is light scheduling on a day that gets very busy, the dining room customer service will be slow and inefficient --affecting sales and reputation. On the contrary, if there is heavy scheduling on light business days, it will become frustrating for waitstaff who will be working very few tables while draining the payroll.

Generally, the schedule should start Sunday; therefore it needs to be posted by Thurs. or Fri. of the previous week. Excel spreadsheet formats are great for scheduling organization. The schedule should be posted in an easily viewable location with enough copies available for all staff. Staff phone lists should be printed, copied and made readily available to all. This improves communication especially for work shift substitutions.

This leads to the substitution process for staff work shifts. There needs to be a Substitution Book readily available with blank spaces for names, upcoming dates and work shifts for the next 1 to 2 months. If a substitution made, the information must be recorded with the date and shift time a.m./p.m. etc. It must be initialed by both parties involved and finally initialed by a manager ensuring no mistakes in communication. A substitution mishap may result in a shift not being covered.

Scheduling may look great for payroll cost control, but it must be remembered that dining room service staff are real people with real lives whose cheerful and efficient service is what restaurants are dependant upon. The schedule maker needs to be understanding towards the staff's schedule requests, but should not roll over and play dead (again, balance). It is impossible to please everyone 100% all of the time, but a proper scheduling balance will truly have a positive effect on restaurant dining room customer service and staff.

*** It is better for a manager or service consultant to handle the schedule at the initial phases of a new operation. Afterwards, it should be monitored by a second or third person-- especially if the restaurant has just opened. Some mature restaurants may let a senior member of the service staff handle the schedule because there is better communicat   with schedule concerns.

Please use whichever system works best for the establishment for the staff schedule is a strong part of customer service and should not be taken lightly.