



## 15 Creative Restaurant Staff Training Ideas

Untrained staff members are your worst assets. They mess up orders, move at a snail's pace during your busiest rushes, and don't embody your restaurant culture.

However, while these staff members are bad at their job, in many cases, that doesn't mean they're unqualified. That doesn't mean they don't have the potential to succeed. They may just be inexperienced, under-prepared, and unsure of how to do work productively.

It's not fair to fire these people if they haven't been properly trained. Take time to really examine your restaurant staff training process to make sure you're giving ample time and opportunities for your staff to learn the ins and outs of your restaurant.

Here are 15 restaurant staff training ideas to get your back-of-house and front-of-house employees up to speed:

### **1. Make a staff training plan.**

Before training new hires, it's important to write out a checklist of what every server, busboy, sous chef, or hostess needs to know by the end of the initial training process. While this may seem tedious -- of course everyone knows that servers need to learn how to use the POS system -- it will help when organizing orientation. This checklist can also be distributed for staff to fill out after they've finished training, giving them the opportunity to deliver feedback about how your training process was helpful, and how it could have run smoother.



### **2. Host a fun orientation with a focus on different types of learning.**

There are three types of learners: visual, auditory, and hands-on. While hands-on learning is a given in the restaurant industry, the others may not be. That's why your orientation should include slides, videos, and even role-plays with veteran staff members. This is also a good time to discuss company culture, your restaurant mission statement, and any other company policies, as well as open the floor to general questions.

### **3. Have new staff shadow old staff, then submit a paragraph about what they learned.**



Shadowing is not an uncommon restaurant staff training idea. However, it is one of the most effective ways to learn in the restaurant industry. Your team can go one step further: Instead of just pairing off employees and hoping for the best, make sure new hires can explain takeaways learned from their shadowing sessions. Ask them to write a short paragraph about their experience or fill out a short questionnaire. This is a great way to make sure new employees are reflecting on what they learned as well as to gather feedback about the performance of current restaurant employees.

### **4. Role-play common (or uncommon) restaurant situations.**

When the new employee is finally ramped up, it's time to role-play. Have veteran staff from both front-of-house and back-of-house role-play certain situations new staff may face. For example, how do servers handle rude customers? What's the best response to, "What do you recommend?" How does kitchen staff react when they accidentally send out a wrong order, and what are the steps to fix this issue? These group problem-solving exercises only need to last 10 minutes at most, and can be a great tradition for your pre-shift meetings. They also add to the camaraderie on your team.

### **5. Assign a mentor for 1 month.**

A mentor program at your restaurant can soften some of the bumps every new hire experiences during the onboarding process. With a mentor, new employees always have someone to turn to when they have questions. The mentor can also show new hires certain processes they will face on a day-to-day basis, such as food safety, carrying plates or food, and satisfying customers with great customer service. If in the back of house, mentors can discuss cooking hacks or answer any questions the new hire has about preparing food on the plate.

### **6. Make POS training fun.**

POS training can sometimes be a drag. If your POS doesn't have a designated training platform (such as Toast University), it can be even more difficult. To get new employees up to speed on your POS system, have them start by filling in someone else's orders on the POS, with that person watching behind. There should also be a checklist next to the system for what to do when checking in and checking out, as well as procedures like handling voids and gift cards. In the end, a verbal test should be given. You know someone's capable when they're able to explain what they've learned to someone else.



## **7. Play Taboo with menu descriptions.**

If you haven't heard of Taboo, it's basically charades, but with talking. The goal is to make people guess the word in front of you without saying it, or without saying other words related to it. You can have all employees play this fun game with menu descriptions. Is there a "fettuccine alfredo" on the menu? Employees can describe "a pasta with a cheesy, creamy sauce and fresh basil." What about a summer cocktail? Employees can describe "a refreshing beverage with light liquor and fruit juice." Make sure the focus is on making these menu items sound desirable. That way, they're learning how to describe dishes to customers.



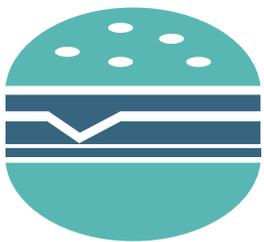
## **8. Offer hands-on experience with supervision.**

When they're ready, give new hires reign over the floor, whether it be back-of-house or front-of-house... but don't leave them alone. Offer hands-on experience, but allow supervisors to offer tips and advice if needed or catch a mistake before it happens. This supervision will give new employees a chance to prove themselves. If there are no mistakes, they are ready. But if there are, at least someone else was there to make sure nothing went awry.

## **9. Give an overview of all positions so staff can stay flexible.**

Here's a fun exercise: switch out the back-of-house and front-of-house staff (when customers aren't there) and see what happens. After being ramped up on their own job, have employees see what it's like to work on the food line, behind the bar (if possible), as a dishwasher, a server, or a host or hostess. This way, they can appreciate the unique challenges every position faces. Employees can then be flexible in your restaurant, and help out others when needed.

## **10. Pop quiz staff members on new menu additions, biggest customers, and best-selling items.**



With your POS system, you should be able to track your best-selling items in product mix reports. Those are the items that customers will be asking for and asking about most often. During pre-shift meetings, pop quiz staff members on these items. You may be able to include these questions as notifications on your POS system. This space can also be used to show quotes or advice from staff members, so staff can learn from several people every day, and so top employees can have their own spotlight on the POS system.

## **11. Share short 15-minute lessons during pre-shift meetings.**

Yes, you should make pre-shift meetings mandatory. They are an opportunity to revisit lessons learned in training, and come at them in a different light, as well as talk about the menu specials that night and pep up the team. A great way to foster camaraderie is not to limit these lessons to the restaurant owner. Instead, let the chef teach the lesson for the night, or the hostess, or the bartender. Everyone can learn from each other.

## **12. Foster friendly competition between multiple restaurants.**

If you have multiple restaurant locations, you can hold friendly competitions between them. For example, if you're a quick-service restaurant near an office complex, track which venue can get the most net sales in an hour. This can also be a great team-building exercise for your employees, as they're learning how to reach towards a goal and perform under pressure. Other ideas for competitions: Which server can upsell the new special the most? How long can your chef staff last without having a customer send back a meal?



## **13. Implement a 360-degree peer review programs.**

Even your veteran members need feedback. As a restaurant owner, you should be reviewing your employees' performance often; however, peer review programs are another great way to collect feedback. After all, employees are interacting with each other all the time, observing behavior and working together to solve problems. A 360-degree peer review program includes feedback from all areas of the organization. A quick survey of employees who work closely with each other can be beneficial when evaluating quarterly performance. You may also consider requiring self-reviews, asking employees to reflect on their own work.

## **14. Train employees to go above and beyond.**

Some people are natural overachievers. Others need a gentle push. When reinforcing training, encourage your restaurant employees to go above and beyond when serving customers or preparing food. Simply sharing your vision for the restaurant and your excitement for its future can create a great team morale. After all, "Great managers makes you feel like they are important. Great leaders makes you feel like you are important." Be that leader for employees in your restaurant. Reward good behavior with bonuses. Teach employees to spoil their best customers with extra sides or free glasses of wine. They may go above and beyond by upselling your loyalty program or experimenting with new ingredients.

## **15. Hold regular meetings to communicate and reinforce training.**



We mentioned the pre-shift meeting already. However, these aren't the only kinds of meetings you should hold at your restaurant. Reinforce training with focus groups about the hand-off process between servers and chefs, highs and lows about that week, and quick tips for filling out orders on the POS system. Weekly service meetings, quarterly product workshops, and staff focus groups are a great way to reinforce restaurant staff training.

These ideas will supercharge your restaurant staff training program. What are some ways you are creatively training your staff? If you want to share your tips for a blog post, email [atetreault@toasttab.com](mailto:atetreault@toasttab.com).

## ***Learn more about Toast!***

With Toast's All-In-One POS system, you can collect customer email addresses, include marketing on receipts, and integrate online ordering into your website. The system also contributes to a seamless guest experience, one of the most important factors for restaurant success, as it is cloud-based and allows customers to pay immediately at the table. Learn more about Toast, including our robust CRM and reporting capabilities, by clicking below.

