

PRESHIFT MEETINGS: KEEPING EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE

Using Pre-Shift Meetings Builds Teamwork, Improves Customer Service and Maximizes Sales

By Robert Welcher

Do you conduct daily pre-shift meetings at your restaurant? If not, you should be. If you are looking for ways to improve your business, conducting pre-shift meetings is a great place to start. They keep everyone on the same page and everyone going in the same direction. Conducting effective pre-shift meetings is the number one thing that restaurant operators can do to reduce turnover, build consistently great service, improve suggestive selling and increase sales.

Pre-shift meetings (“pre-shifts”) are all about communication. Every restaurant should have a communication strategy and part of an effective communication strategy is continually communicating with your staff. Daily pre-shifts are a great way to communicate on a regular basis. Without a doubt, it is the best tool to focus and focus and prepare your staff to provide excellent service and to create sales.

The goal of pre-shifts is to educate, motivate and build a sense of teamwork. The outgrowth of this communication is creating great service, improving the customer experience and maximizing sales. They help ensure that your staff knows what is going on at the restaurant, the community and with the customers.

One of the most effective ongoing training tools is the pre-shift meeting. No matter how effective your training program, its effectiveness will diminish if you do not continually train and constantly reinforce standards and performance criteria. As most operators know, staff training is an ongoing process. Performed on a continuing basis, it will produce a positive impact on customer service, sales and your bottom line.

There are side benefits. One restaurant owner uses pre-shifts to judge the mood of his back- and front-of-the-house associates. On occasion, he has sent associates home that are in a bad mood. He closed a section of the restaurant to avoid exposing his valued customers to an associate that is not going to provide friendly and efficient service.

1) Pre-Shift Meeting Agenda

Using an agenda helps management effectively plan the meetings. Construct a pre-shift template for your managers that they prepare before the pre-shift. The agenda should have a checklist for the meeting with notes for the topics. Occasionally, check the manager's pre-shift agenda and comment on the content.

2) Keep It Simple, Keep It Short

An effective pre-shift meeting is simple, informal and interactive. Stick to the topic at hand, defer any non-relevant to the end of the pre-shift. An effective pre-shift meeting should be no more than 10 minutes in length. The messages should be designed to inform, instruct and motivate. Focus on key points of the agenda, don't digress and lose track of the goals of the meeting.

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3) Break-Out By Position

Since responsibilities vary by position, it is best to conduct a general pre-shift for all the staff – front- and back-of-the-house –breaking out groups by position. Have the chef / kitchen manager conduct a back-of-the-house pre-shift meeting, a manager conduct a server and bartender meeting, and a manager or lead host conduct the host pre-shift. This will allow the presentation of relevant information by position.

4) Keep It Interactive

Keeping the pre-shift interactive will makes the meeting more lively and entertaining, keeping your staff's attention. In addition to the role-play and rehearsal, ask team members questions and ask their opinions about various topics, activities or problems at the restaurant. Involving the staff in the operational process makes them feel like more of a part of the operation and promotes teamwork.

5) Food Education

When a customer asks about a menu item, your staff should be able to speak with authority about the menu item. They should have the knowledge to properly inform the customer about the ingredients, preparation and flavors of each menu item.

In addition, there is no substitute for actually tasting the food item, which includes standard menu items and daily specials. Have the kitchen prepare a tasting of a selected menu item and the daily special(s) for the server staff. This allows the servers to provide their customers with a personal recommendation when presenting the specials, "I just sampled the chicken Florentine and it is excellent".

6) Role-Play and Rehearsal

This is a great time for role-play and rehearsal of the service staff. Pre-shifts are golden opportunity to reinforce menu knowledge, suggestive selling and daily specials.

- **Staff Menu Knowledge** – role-play / rehearse servers and bartenders to test and reinforce their menu knowledge and ability to present menu items to customers.
- **Suggestive Selling** – role-play / rehearse servers and bartenders to test and reinforce their suggestive selling of beverages, appetizer, soup, salad and dessert.
- **Present the Daily Specials** – role-play / rehearse servers' and bartenders' presentation of the daily specials.

Note: Servers must memorize the daily specials and their descriptions. They should never be allowed to read the descriptions. Selecting several servers to describe the daily specials in the pre-shift will motivate them to memorize the specials.

Educate, Motivate and Build a Sense Teamwork

Build great service, improve suggestive selling and increase sales.

7) Salesmanship Rehearsal

As part of the on-going training, pick one menu category – beverage, appetizer, soup, salad, dessert – and have several servers perform their sell as they would at the table. If you have not documented the salesmanship scripts, develop the sell scripting to provide your staff with the proper tools to succeed.

Focus on selling one menu category per meeting. Say the manager decides to rehearse the dessert sell at the meeting. Instead of demonstrating the dessert sell, the manager asks a server to perform their dessert sell. The manager asks a server to role play the dessert sell by stating, "Susan, I am the guest and I have finished my entrée. What you say?" Susan responds, "I want to tell you about our wonderful desserts. We have a chunky apple pie, death by chocolate and my favorite our homemade carrot cake. Would you like the apple pie, death-by-chocolate or the carrot cake?" The manager replies, "If the guest says 'I'll take the carrot cake' what would you say?" Susan says, "Would you like a scoop of ice cream on top of that?"

Use the "I say, you say" training technique in rapid succession with the server staff to keep their attention during the meeting.

8) Promotions, Advertisements, Parties Or Groups

Pre-shifts are an opportune time to alert the staff of promotions, advertisements that are current for that day. It is also a great time to let the staff know that you are expecting large parties or groups. If there are any special instructions required for the parties or groups, provide the staff with the instructions, so there are no surprises.

9) Recognize Team Member's Accomplishments

Take time to recognize team members' accomplishments – personal and professional. On a weekly and monthly basis, it is a good idea to establish recognition awards for individual performance, which can be for “above and beyond” the call of duty – covering shifts, working late, going out of the way to make a customer happy, highest check average, most improved check average, etc. The award may be symbolic instead of something of value – public recognition in front of their peers is a strong reward motivator.

One chef awards a “golden spatula” to a worthy back-of-the-house associate each week for exemplary performance, cost savings, “above and beyond” performance, etc. This small token is a simple form of recognition that is invaluable in recognizing and motivating staff.

Now that you know how to conduct a pre-shift meeting you will soon be reaping the benefits of an educated, well-coached and motivated team. Make pre-shifts part of your everyday routine. **AKT – Always Keep Training! ♦**

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