

Trickilo: Treating kitchen staff with respect rewards employer with loyalty, low turnover

Ken Trickilo, executive chef for the Napa Valley Grille in Paramus, N.J., recently was faced with a challenge he hasn't had in about four years: hiring a new cook. In an industry where restaurants commonly turn over every position at least once a year, retention at Napa Valley Grille has been stable for the past six years, particularly among the kitchen staff.

The eatery is one of six in a chain owned by Emeryville, Calif.-based Tavistock Restaurants LLC, which also is the parent of California Café and several other concepts.

Trickilo, a 1992 graduate of The Culinary Institute of America, joined Napa Valley in 1999 as a sous chef. When he took over the kitchen a year later, he inherited a veteran staff. With a crew of about 25, most have now been in their posts for nine years and the rest for four.

How have you been able to hang on to your sous chefs, cooks and dishwashers? I know this is a tough business. When I think of how I was treated by chefs, I know that it was not a way for me to succeed or

treat people. I believe in treating everyone with the same respect I want.

How were you treated?

There was a lot more yelling and screaming and throwing things. I've had things thrown at me — knives thrown in the garbage. I've seen a lot. There is a lot of turnover in restaurants with new people always coming and going. People don't want to be treated like that anymore.

In what ways did you respond to that kind of behavior?

I have a high level of patience, so I deal with it. Kids today will say "To hell with you," and go work for someone else.

How can chefs improve morale in their kitchens?

By being more patient with their staff, giving them opportunities to grow and treating them like you treat your own family. You spend more hours with them than you do your own family.

Having a good staff and a positive atmosphere makes the day go a lot easier, versus screaming over every little thing.

— Dina Berta



Ken Trickilo

NEWS DIGESTS

Wetzel's Pretzels wants to make stars out of its employees

PASADENA, CALIF. — Wetzel's Pretzels, the 250-unit pretzel bakery chain based here, is looking to boost customer service with an employee incentive program called "Catch a Star," which awards three finalists with a "movie star" visit to Hollywood this summer and a screen test for a major motion picture.

Employees will be evaluated for the program through mystery shopper scores and then nominated by their store managers. Finalists will be chosen for their product knowledge, selling ability, work ethic, customer rapport and teamwork. Any Wetzel's Pretzels worker who interacts with customers and has been employed continuously from January to July is eligible for the program.

While in Hollywood, the three contest winners will receive makeovers, spa treatments and a limousine transport to Fox Studios for the screen test. John Davis, who has produced such movies as "Dr. Doolittle" and "The Firm," will select a winner for a walk-on role in a yet-to-be-named 2006 film.

T.G.I. Friday's names top general managers

CARROLLTON, TEXAS — After evaluating business performance at its 804 company-owned and franchised units, T.G.I. Friday's recently honored its top-performing general managers from around the globe.

The company recognized 12 divisional general managers of the year and three overall general managers of the year at the annual T.G.I. Friday's Global Leadership Conference held earlier this month at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. First time winners received a Rolex watch, and repeat winners were awarded a trip to Aruba.

This year's overall general manager honorees were: John Faire, Orlando, Fla.; Michael Schnidrig, Vancouver, Wash.; and Andrey Tumanov, Sheremetyevo, Moscow.

The U.S. divisional general manager winners included: John Holden, Braintree, Mass.; Bob Layman, Wood Ridge, N.J.; Calvin Clay, Pensacola, Fla.; Brian Sawyer, Thornton, Colo.; Sandra Osborn, Batavia, Ill.; Brad Clark, Tulsa, Okla.; and Ron Hoffbeck, Minneapolis Airport, Minn.

The international divisional general managers of the year included: Dae Hiue Kim, Daegu (Yeok), Korea; John Cheetham, Sheffield, United Kingdom; Berker Sohtoryk, Istanbul/Etiler, Turkey; Fabiola Osnaya, Mexico City; and Tommy Hsu, Chung Li/Metrowalk Mall, Taipei, Taiwan.

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