

# Operational Efficiency



## Is Not Automatic

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**T**oday's foodservice operations need to be able to run leaner and meaner than ever before. Gaining operational efficiency is demanding, and requires constant managing of the overall operation, and it involves making the correct assessments and decisions with such issues as safety and sanitation, production, firing, hiring, training, scheduling, food procurement, equipment and supplies purchasing, and maintenance, plus dealing with all of the challenges of the day-to-day business of guest satisfaction.

It is not possible to simply cut your way to operational efficiency. Operational efficiency is created through the application of a well-crafted plan, and the tools to execute that plan. The old adage, "don't put your cart before your horse," applies to this situation. It is all too easy to allow inefficiency to fester in a business and blame the problem on staff, when in fact it may be a cumulative disorder in the business. The great majority of restaurants are well run businesses and have gone to great lengths to address each of these areas, first in their business plan, and then in their practice. However, even the most well run business can always stand continuous process improvement.

With so many variables to manage, it is more important than ever to examine each small aspect of the business and find ways of making improvements. It is recommended that the business have, or construct, a standard operating procedures manual. Each of the above and other aspects of the business should be well documented. If management will keep a daily log or diary, then at a convenient time they can address the problem areas of their business. The best way to do this is to keep a log of issues that arise in the course of doing business, and then constantly review operating procedures.

The necessary steps for making mid-course corrections that will improve operational efficiency are:

**Analyzing process flow.** If the problem in the business is slow food delivery times, then the problems may likely be found on the cooking line. It could be a piece of cooking equipment that is slowing down the process, or it could be that the food item needs to be cooked a different way. There may be another way to speed up food delivery, such as par cooking and/or using more pre-prepared foods.

You might think about calling a manufacturer's rep to ask for a demo of your food product in their manufacturer's latest energy efficiency technologies. You will discover that these manufacturer's reps have a wealth of knowledge and can help you in many consultative ways.

### **Developing a work team that shares the same goal.**

It takes a team effort to observe the operation from different perspectives, then develop work-around solutions. This is accomplished by developing a virtual work team from your staff. The cooks and wait staff need to share a common vision, and be able to zero in on the problems in service operation, and then work together to solve them.

### **Deploy energy-efficient equipment and procedures.**

Foodservice operations are extremely energy-intensive. They consume more than 575,000 btu per square foot per year. The Department of Energy has sanctioned an ENERGY STAR® certification label for equipment that meets the highest standards of energy efficiency. Information on ENERGY STAR equipment can be found at the following web address: [fishnick.com](http://fishnick.com). As mentioned previously, you can arrange a demonstration of these energy-efficient appliances by calling one of the manufacturer's reps listed in this month's Trade Talk.

Developing a stagger-starting equipment items schedule is a wise practice, because it reduces energy waste. If you know that it only takes 12 minutes to pre-heat a fryer, then there is really no need to turn it on 3 hours before the serving period. 30 minutes ahead of time adds peace of mind and monetary savings at the same time. When the meal period is over, turn it off. You can turn it back on again for the next meal period and it will take just a few minutes to be back up to temperature. If this became the new habitual practice of the line cook, the energy savings would be enormous, plus the equipment would last longer.

### **Improve productivity with equipment that has the greatest throughput capacity.**

Some operators feel that they can reduce their cost by skimping on the cooking line. Reducing cost on the cooking equipment is seen as a positive step to reducing operating cost. And reducing operating cost is confused with operational efficiency. By the

same token, buying the top of the line equipment won't necessarily make you more money, or make you more efficient. I have seen over the last several decades penny-pinching in the back of the house, and almost a limitless budget on the front of the house with marble this and oak that. The assumption is that if the customer can't see it, it is not important.

It is interesting that even the smallest operators recognize value when purchasing food. They understand that the price they pay for food items like a gallon can of corn from two different vendors may be within pennies of each other, but on further examination one brand may have more actual corn and less water than the other. The smart operator buys the can with the greatest amount of actual corn per dollar every time. This is a small example of exercising operational efficiency with respect to food purchasing.

The saying "you get what you pay for" is certainly true when it comes to cooking equipment. Budget-model cooking equipment such as fryers are built cheap to sell cheap. They are not designed to be efficient or productive. They are not designed to last for more than 5 years. They are inefficient, producing slightly less than half as much product per hour as their standard product counterparts. They produce approximately one-third as much product per hour as the high efficiency models.

I am certain that most operators are not aware of the poor performance of these budget \$700 - \$800 fryers. There is a presumption that a fryer is a fryer. All fryers look the same, but that is where the similarities end. Just like the gallon can of corn example I gave previously, these inefficient fryers are like

getting 2 quarts of corn and 2 quarts of water in every gallon. Operational efficiency demands that the operator maximize the productivity and throughput in the smallest footprint possible.

The point here is that the customer may not be able to see the inexpensive kitchen equipment, but it may affect their dining experience. Slow and unproductive equipment will cause the food orders to back up, slowing down the speed to service. This in almost every case causes the wait staff to be anxious, frustrated, and on edge. Customers pick up on this chaos as they sit impatiently waiting for their food order.

We have all been there. We go out to dinner and are seated after a long wait. We order food and sit for 15 to 20 minutes waiting for our order to arrive. Then we see the people that were just seated 10 minutes ago get their food. The waiter/waitress comes by and says, "Your food will be out in just a minute." You then see other tables that you are certain were seated after you getting their orders. Finally you get your food order, but your dining experience has been damaged.

Operational efficiency is not automatic. It requires planning and execution. Achieving operational efficiency should be in the mission statement of every foodservice operation from restaurants to church kitchens. If it became the focus of all employees, they would work to make their jobs more enjoyable, which in turn will make the business more profitable. The real value of seeking optimal operational efficiency is that the customers recognize a well managed operation by rewarding them with repeat business. Everybody wins.