

Build a Team Focused on OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Operators share their tips for selecting, training, coaching and developing team members committed to Operational Excellence.



BEFORE HE WAS AN OPERATOR, Matt Webber was a triathlete, P.E. teacher and fast-pitch softball coach. He knows well, therefore, exactly what it takes to build a cohesive team. Time and again he's seen driven athletes come together in order to run, jump, sweat and stretch—not as individuals, but as a group—in joint pursuit of their collective best.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Webber takes a team approach to owning and driving Operational Excellence at his Plano, Texas-based Mall Restaurant. "I like to think of my team as the face of my Restaurant," he says. "They're the ones interacting with customers, so it's of the utmost importance that we have a very well-trained staff that gets what Operational Excellence is all about."

As Webber demonstrates, finding and developing talent is the foundation for creating a team that can continually execute Operational Excellence, both on the field and behind the counter. *Create* spoke with Webber and other Operators who shared their favorite strategies for selecting, training, coaching and developing a winning team focused on Operational Excellence.

Don Ball's team members Tremeika Hollins (left) and Kimberly Rich (right) are motivated to execute Operational Excellence, all day every day.

1 Select the best. Operator Bill Johnson looks for team members with an instinctive desire for excellence. "We can teach you how to run the register and to do certain tasks, but what we can't teach you is personality," says Johnson, a multi-Unit Operator in Baltimore, Maryland.

In order to find team members who live and breathe Operational Excellence, Operators must know where to look. The best place to look, Webber says, is with existing team members. "I love the team member referral," he says, adding that his entire daytime staff was hired as a result of team member recommendations. "I believe that birds of a feather flock together. Webber also recruits actively at local schools and at his front counter. Because they've experienced it firsthand, he says, customers know better than anyone what it takes to deliver an excellent customer experience.

Operators are also likely to get great results when they use the job interview as a platform for explaining Operational Excellence—the importance of great-tasting food, speed of service, attentive and courteous behavior and cleanliness—and identifying candidates who are dedicated to carrying it out. "[After the second interview], we ask them to take a look at

"TEAM MEMBERS HAVE TO DEVELOP SOME SENSE OF OWNERSHIP IN THE BUSINESS."

—MATT WEBBER

Chick-fil-A.com because we want them to grab a hold of our values. Before we'll set up a third interview, we ask them to notify us if they see something about Chick-fil-A® that they want to be a part of."

By asking job candidates to interact with Chick-fil-A's vision and values as part of the interview process, Webber says he succeeds in separating people who want to be part of a family from those who just want to receive a paycheck. The former, he argues, are ideally suited to execute Operational Excellence. As a practical application, Webber takes them through the job aides and gets intentional in areas in which they'll be involved.

2 Prioritize practical training. Don Ball has been an Operator since 1973. In that time, he's learned a lot about finding and training team members. Upon making hires, he's found that it's best to immediately enroll new team members in a training session with his Unit Training Coordinator (UTC), who gives them at least 12 hours of classroom training in order to impress upon them the importance of Operational Excellence before they interact with cus-



Don Ball (right) and his leadership team provide at least 12 hours of training to new team members.

tomers. Training includes role-playing and detailed discussions about Operational Excellence so that team members understand what is expected of them in theory and in practice.

Webber likes to bring new hires into his Restaurant for job shadowing before he enrolls them in classroom training. Doing so, he says, gives employees real-world context in which to learn and experience Operational Excellence from team members who already know how to deliver it. "We generally pick one of our top performers, and they'll actually spend an entire week shadowing them before we start the team member development process," Webber says.

3 Make coaching count. Because Operational Excellence drives sales, Ball stresses, it's important to keep team members excited about it long after they've been hired. He suggests Operators build the same connection with their team members that they build with their customers. "You have to be involved with them not only in selling chicken but also be involved in their lives."

In the spirit of coaching, Johnson is intentional to encourage, because positive feedback helps reinforce Operational Excellence. "We give praise every day," he says. "It's a matter of celebrating when a customer has something great to say about one of my team members and making a big deal about it in front



of their peers. They really thrive on that, and it further fuels Operational Excellence."

Operators who make a point to model Operational Excellence by having weekly huddles, tasting food daily, rolling up their sleeves and breading chicken, and keeping their teams updated on RQAs see the best results.

"I'm the cheerleader," Johnson

says. "I set the standard at the Operator level, and that feeds right through the management team to my team members."

4 Develop long-term excellence.

Motivating a long-term commitment requires team members to invest in you in return. "Team members have to develop some sense of ownership in the business," says Webber, who gives his team members a sense of accountability by including them in strategic planning, whether it's inviting them to contribute ideas for monthly marketing campaigns or asking them to help complete regu-

lar Restaurant Quality Assessments (RQAs). "Team members can see that they're more than just cashiers, and as a result, they take ownership in what we're trying to accomplish with Operational Excellence." When teams like Webber's are more actively involved in business-building tasks like RQAs, Operators often see their Raving Fans Index (RFI) scores rise, which means customers are seeing improved performance. For that reason, Ball encourages long-term professional development by continually posting those scores, which he says motivates employees to set goals and measure progress.

Because teamwork is so important to Operational Excellence, Operators must take great care to turn individuals into group-minded team leaders. Doing that, Johnson suggests, often starts with personalized counseling. "If team members are having trouble with something, I try to counsel them," he says. "Once we drill into what the issue is, we put them with a buddy for a couple of days so that they can hopefully work through the humps."

Follow-up training benefits the buddy as well as the student, as it represents a chance for both team members to engage in long-term professional development. "It's about keeping everyone involved and making sure that we celebrate together when we succeed and learn together when we need to make improvements," Johnson says. "It really brings the whole team together." **CRF**

Training Chick-n-Strips™ Champs

Make your spring promotion a success, with these lessons learned from last year's Chick-n-Strips™ rollout.

Product promotions often provide the best tests of a team's grasp of Operational Excellence. Team members system-wide were tested last spring with both a new product and a major promotion when Chick-fil-A introduced its new Chick-n-Strips™.

Operator Matt Webber, of Plano, Texas, put his team through a Chick-n-Strips™ "boot camp" in order to produce excellence with education. "We sampled the product and learned together how it's supposed to be cooked, what it's supposed to look and taste like," he says.

Product knowledge helped multi-Unit Operator Bill Johnson's team, too.

When he introduced Chick-n-Strips™ at his FSU in Glen Burnie, Maryland, he sampled them not only with employees but also with their families, generating a great deal of enthusiasm.

That enthusiasm served them well during the Chick-fil-A Chick-n-Strips® Giveaway promotion during Labor Day. Team members were committed to serving the product hot, fresh and fast. Johnson made sure that his team members and systems were prepared for extra volume and additional traffic.

"On days that we know we're going to have an exceptional number of



guests, we'll ramp up our staff to make sure we can accommodate them from a service standpoint," Johnson says, adding that on Labor Day 2008, he scheduled extra team members and assigned two of them to prepare nothing but strips all day. "It's all about taking care of team members and staffing accordingly so they can be successful in their job if we're going to be extremely busy."

O2O

Two Operators share their strategies for executing fast and flawless service.

Balancing Speed & Accuracy

Like running a relay race, running a Restaurant is a true team endeavor—especially when Operational Excellence is involved. Because Operational Excellence requires that orders be accurate, delays are always possible. Luckily, teamwork can help Restaurants deliver on both speed and accuracy. *Create* caught up with Operators Don Ball and Matt Webber, who sounded off on how best to balance these two competing values in pursuit of ongoing Operational Excellence.

Create: Is speed or accuracy more important?

Webber: We start with stressing accuracy. If we get the little things right, the speed will come. We firmly believe that if we can be accurate, attentive and courteous, speed will develop over time.

Ball: I agree with Matt. In the beginning, it's about training team members in accuracy and teaching them the correct and accurate way to do things. And then speed comes after that. At some point, speed becomes just as important as accuracy, but you can't expect it in the beginning. It takes time to develop.

Create: How do you create a team that excels in both?

Ball: Training. We usually give an employee between 18 and 21 hours of training before they actually go behind the counter. They have to memorize the menu board—the prices and products. When we get them into the Unit, we work on speed. But if your team members are not well trained, or you've had a lot of turnover, it becomes much harder.

Webber: Team member retention is important, as well. We make sure that we have people who have been with us over a long period of time and who know Chick-fil-A®, know the system, know the menu and know our customers.

Create: How do you cope with challenges that might compromise your commitment to speed and accuracy?

Ball: We ensure communication between the team member and the customer. Hopefully, we're meeting their expectations and helping them understand why something is going to take longer, if it is. It's an opportunity to make a connection with a customer, because if it's done right, you're sending a great message to the customer that we care about them.



Operator: Don Ball
Location: Forest Drive FSU and Two Notch Road FSU Columbia, South Carolina
Speed vs. accuracy: "Speed and accuracy is like bread and

butter. You like the bread, but the butter improves the taste of the bread. You like speed of service because that allows you, when you are busy, to move your customers. But at the same time, you need accuracy because if you do not provide it, then your customers aren't going to be satisfied."

Operator: Matt Webber

Location: Collin Creek Mall, Plano, Texas

Speed vs. accuracy: "I define speed as moving with a sense of purpose and a sense of urgency.

Accuracy is making sure that the customers are getting the order the way they want it. Speed and accuracy are totally separate, but together they make for a great combination. When you're able to be accurate, and to move with purpose and urgency, it creates a great customer experience."



Webber: I think the cream always rises to the top when you're in a difficult situation. We usually are creatures of habit, and we do things certain ways. What do you do when all of a sudden, you have a big day and two people don't show up, or you have a large order, or someone gets sick, or a piece of equipment breaks? An experienced crew that you've trained and hired will always step up and fill the gap.

Create: What's the bottom line?

Ball: In the economy that we're in, speed and accuracy holds everything together. I'll do whatever it takes to make sure my customers are satisfied.

Webber: It's so important, especially in today's market and in today's quick-service industry, that we're doing things right and taking care of our customers. It's crucial that customers know what they're going to get when they come to Chick-fil-A. It is what separates us from our competition.