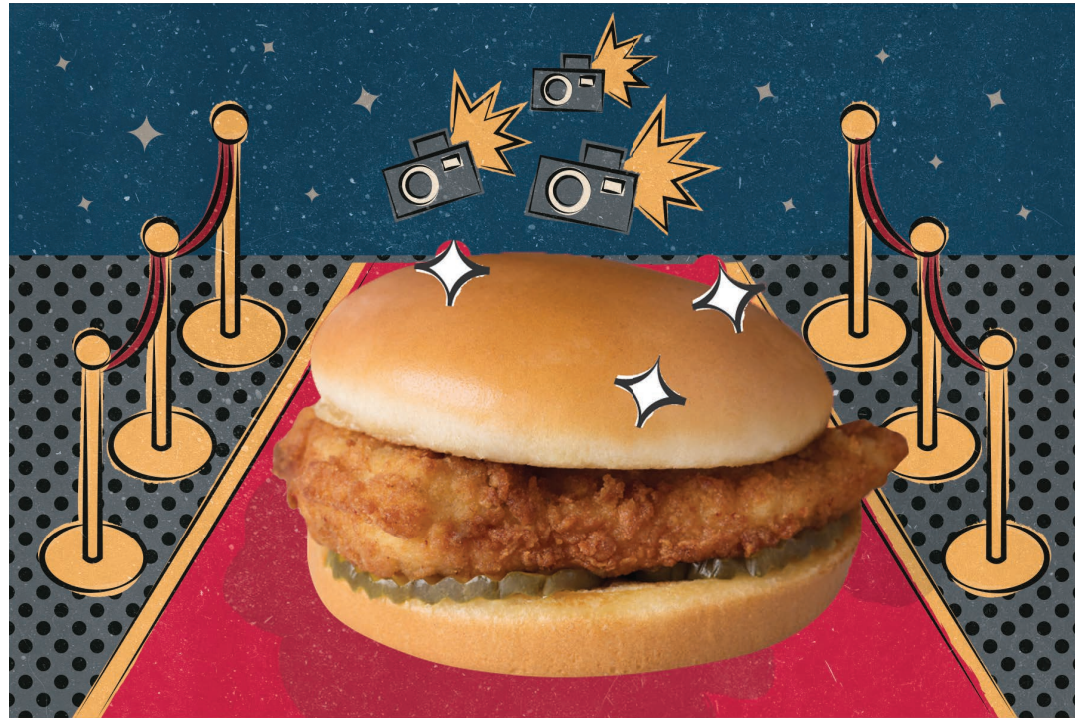


The HERO Initiative has helped Operators
preserve Chick-fil-A's legacy of food excellence.

PROTECTING QUALITY



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LITERATURE IS FULL OF HEROES AND LEGENDS

whose iconic stories have captivated audiences for generations. As it turns out, so are Chick-fil-A® restaurants, whose menus feature heroes as well, heroes that have served for decades as the brand's most beloved ambassadors. Called "hero products," they are the foundation of the Chick-fil-A menu.

"We call our hero products 'hero products' for a reason," says Operator Ann Collins, who operates Victory at Skidaway FSR in Savannah, Georgia. "It's because they're our history. Our identity. They're the first thing people usually experience when they're introduced to Chick-fil-A. Anybody can have a chicken sandwich, but we have the best chicken sandwich—and that's what sets us apart."

In recent years, hero products like the Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich have been faced with some trials and tribulations. Taste scores on the Customer Experience Monitor (CEM) were down across the chain from 2014 to 2017.

"Over the last few years we've been dealing with increased complexity and growth in our business. We've been so focused on adding new products that we haven't focused as much as we should on those original hero products, which are the foundation of our menu," says Operator Betsy Salzman, who operates the Ellijay FSR in Ellijay, Georgia. "Now feels like the right time for us to go back to our roots and revisit those foundational products."

To refocus on the hero products, the Support Center launched a chain-wide effort, partnering with Operators and Team Leaders to refocus and recalibrate in preserving Truett's legacy of food excellence.

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SAFETY IS TASTY

The HERO Initiative took place from March until June 2018 and included hundreds of in-Restaurant sessions across the chain. During each three-hour consultative session, small groups of Operators and their Team Leaders worked with a pair of Business Consultants to discuss challenges and opportunities in areas such as thawing, fileting, breading and cooking. The goal: Preserve the power of our hero products and preserve Chick-fil-A's legacy of food excellence.

The format was ideal, according to Operator John Starr, who operates the Snellville FSR in Snellville, Georgia. "It was a shorter session, which gave us a lot of time to go back to our Restaurant to discuss with our Team Members all the lessons we learned that day," he says.

For John and Betsy, one of the most important lessons was in the area of capacity. At his Restaurant, for example, John's Team Members frequently worried they would run out of product if faced with a sudden rush or a large catering order. So, they regularly kept a cushion of extra pans of chicken in the walk-in cooler, creating a risk of cross-contamination with adjacent produce.

At her Restaurant, Betsy's Team Members also pulled more chicken from the freezer than they needed. During their respective HERO Initiative sessions, both Operators learned to better forecast their chicken needs while also optimizing storage in their thaw cabinets and breading tables.

"What we needed to do, I learned, is recalibrate our Lean Chicken rotation process," says Betsy, who subsequently created a new position in her Restaurant dedicated to managing the Lean Chicken Thawing process with the goal of pulling only enough chicken to satisfy the Restaurant's needs, versus stocking the entire thaw cabinet. Called the Chicken Inventory Manager, the position is on the schedule every day for a six-hour shift, during which time his or her responsibilities encompass all things related to chicken quality and preparation, including: food safety, cleanliness,

forecasting and fileting. "They're really just making sure: Chickenwise, are we ready for the next day, are we safe and are we tracking chicken appropriately through the Restaurant?"

The result, according to Betsy, is increased confidence in food quality and safety. "It gives our leadership a lot of confidence in our process, and it adds a layer of accountability and ownership," she says.

Of course, mastery over processes also gives Restaurants mastery over taste. "We didn't need so many cases of thawed chicken; it was a comfort zone," explains John, who says removing their safety net forced his Team Members to adopt a new mindset that prioritizes vigilance over convenience—which pays dividends in flavor. "When you get rid of that comfort zone, it allows you to get food out faster. Therefore, you get a better product."

For more details on the HERO Initiative, search "HERO Initiative" on @Chick-fil-A.





OPTIMUM OIL

Speaking of taste: A major revelation for Operators in Ann's market was the impact of oil quality.

"One of the light bulb moments for our market group was realizing that oil is an ingredient just like everything else," Ann says. "Good oil is key to good food."

Although she has always emphasized the importance of oil quality with her team, new tools introduced during the HERO Initiative raised oil's profile in her Restaurant even further. New oil test kits, for instance, allow Team Members to collect oil samples from their Restaurant's fryer and compare them with a reference to ensure optimum color, smell and taste.

"Everybody was so excited to get the oil test kits," Ann says. "We have the Henny Penny day counter which helps toward oil quality, but the new oil kit gives better guidance based on the oil's usage. The kit takes the question mark out of the equation and gives you a true visual to measure against."

Even more exciting and most impactful, according to Ann, are new oil filters that keep oil cleaner, longer. "The new oil filters have been life-changing for our team," she continues. "Before, we were in a cycle of rotating our Hennys and trying to do a boil out every single day. Now, you can hold your oil for up to two weeks if you're a high-volume Restaurant, which is huge."

With the extra time gained here, Team Members in the kitchen can devote more time and energy to correct food-prep procedures, which yields better food on a more consistent basis.

"THIS BUSINESS GETS SO BUSY AND SO COMPLEX THAT IT'S EASY TO FORGET THE BASICS."

—Operator John Starr, Snellville FSR in Snellville, Georgia



EFFICIENCY EQUALS EXCELLENCE

Oil isn't the only medium through which Restaurants can improve food quality. Another area of opportunity is the breading table, where Team Members at Betsy's Restaurant had previously fileted chicken on demand. During her HERO Initiative session, however, she discovered it was more efficient, better for quality and equally as food safe to filet chicken in advance of peak periods.

"We were fileting as we went at our breading table, but we've since changed our procedure so we now filet a daypart ahead," explains Betsy, who says doing this reduces demands on the breeder so that he or she can spend more time on quality control and less time playing catch-up. "We are busier and busier now, and when it's really busy it's hard to do a good job fileting as you go. You don't really have time to spend on extra details like making sure the filet is the right size and the right shape. When you filet a daypart ahead, you can take the time to make sure each sandwich will be perfect."

The breading table also was a locus of learning for his team, says John, who spoke at length about the benefits of efficiency with the Operators in his market during their HERO Initiative session. "We talked about the three-step, three-second rule, which is something I have always taught," he says. It's also something he asks himself and his leaders to consider whenever they're implementing a new system: Will Team Members have to move more than three steps or three seconds from their stations to get the job done? "If employees have everything they need where they need it, they won't feel rushed and will be more likely to make sandwiches correctly."

In John's Restaurant, giving Team Members everything they need where they need it was easier said than done. "Because we're in an older Restaurant that's about 31 years old, we have a basement and spend a lot of time running down there to grab things such as coater," John continues. "So after our HERO Initiative session, we ordered shelving through TriMark Strategic, and the general contractors installed it near and around our breading table where we now keep two cases of coater at a time."

Catering equipment, biscuit mix and mixing bowls also were moved upstairs from the basement, which has streamlined workflows in ways that make Team Members more effective when they're preparing hero products. "A lot of newer Restaurants already have shelving," John says, "but for us it was a big deal."



TEACHING THE WHY

At the end of the day, the HERO Initiative was about details—all the little things that add up to big results. During a busy lunch rush, those are the easiest things to forget, according to John, who says one of the HERO Initiative's most important takeaways was something he's always preached in his business: Teach the "why."

"I'm a big believer in explaining the why," John says. "This business gets so busy and so complex that it's easy to forget the basics. When you know the why, it's easier to understand the process and embrace it."

The HERO Initiative was designed to show the why as much as tell it. For example, at the sessions Operators deliberately made sandwiches that were wrong and tasted them alongside sandwiches that were right.

"It showcased how the sandwich was even more incredible when it was made correctly," says Ann, who subsequently repeated the same exercise with the leaders at her Restaurant.

After their HERO Initiative sessions, both Ann and John emphasized with their teams one "why"

in particular: why it's important to press on filets with one's palm during the breading process.

"A lot of our guys were pushing with their fingers instead of their palm," John says. Applying pressure properly ensures full coater coverage.

He provides similar explanations to Team Members during daily quality checks that he and his leaders have been conducting ever since participating in the HERO Initiative. "When I come in, I'll check in at the breading table and ask, 'Hey man, how's it going? How's our hero product looking?' It's just a short conversation, but as I'm talking I'll watch and make sure they're following procedure. Sometimes they do it well and sometimes there are teaching moments."

So far, it appears to be working: Since John attended the HERO Initiative session, CEM scores for taste of the Chick-fil-A Chicken Sandwich have increased 9 percent at his Restaurant. "You can definitely tell a difference," he says. "The numbers don't lie."

It's the happy ending to a food hero's journey: not just tastier chicken, but happier Customers. ■

