



Operator Danny Daniels and a few of his Team Members at Woodlawn Square FSR.

Building on a Foundation of OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Four Operators share how a renewed focus on Operational Excellence helped take their Restaurants' performance to the next level.

FOR SOME, "GOOD" IS GOOD ENOUGH— but not for Operator Scott Fraser.

Operational Excellence scores at his Quintard Mall Restaurant in Oxford, Alabama, were consistently high. Still, when his Leadership Team set an ambitious goal to become the number-one mall Restaurant in the Gulf Coast Region for Operational Excellence in 2012, he didn't shy away from the challenge. There was just one problem: Many of his Team Members weren't quite sure what Operational Excellence was.

"They had heard of Operational Excellence and knew there was an Operational Excellence score, but many of them didn't

know what the four components were," says Scott, who became an Operator in 2011. "How can you drive results in Operational Excellence when half your team doesn't know what it is?"

He began educating his team about Operational Excellence by actively tracking his Restaurant's scores and sharing them daily with Team Members through a posted chart and one-on-one touch-ins with him or one of his leaders.

"We use the tools Chick-fil-A® has given us to track where we are and where we want to be," says Scott, adding that Team Members are more motivated to move the needle on excellence when they can see

where the needle is. "The fact that you have access to that information whenever you want it is huge."

Recent research supports Scott's observation. According to a 2012 study of successful companies by global management consultancy Hay Group, 81 percent of high-performing organizations help employees feel aligned with their company by clearly communicating strategies and goals. Likewise, 73 percent of high-performing companies regularly inform employees about business plans and results.

Although his team just missed its goal—his Restaurant came in second in the Region last year—it improved Operational

Excellence by more than six points. Scott refuses to rest on his laurels when it comes to setting, tracking and communicating Operational Excellence goals and continues to pursue improvement.

Making Good Great

To raise his Restaurant's Operational Excellence scores, Scott took a comprehensive approach, starting at the front counter. "Especially in a lower-volume situation, sometimes you have to choose between having fresh food and giving fast service," he says. "The most practical thing we did was intentionally decide to always serve fresh food."

Unfortunately, cooking less more often meant some guests had to wait for their meals. Scott's solution was simple: communication. "Our average ticket time is probably below average, yet we have one of the top 20 scores in the chain in speed of service," he says. "The reason is because we over-communicate with guests about what they're waiting on and how long they're going to wait. If a guest is going to be waiting on a fresh batch of Nuggets, and you can call that guest by name, all of a sudden they're not mad about waiting; they're happy."

Focusing on front-counter communication was important, but Scott knew his Leadership Team's goal of becoming number one in Operational Excellence would require his team to step it up another notch.

"We felt like we'd maxed out what we could do behind the counter, so we committed to scheduling a dining room host every day through lunch," he says. "Since doing that, we've seen a pretty dramatic change in our scores."

Leading with Leaders

Five years ago, Operator Danny Daniels felt stuck. Business at his Woodlawn Square FSR in Marietta, Georgia, was stagnant, and he knew things needed to change.

"I was at a point where I was doing too much myself," Danny says. "I was working too much in the business and not enough on the business. I knew that if I was going to be the kind of Operator I wanted to be, I could not continue to operate in the manner I was operating in."

Danny, who has been an Operator since 1984, decided that the kind of Operator he wanted to be would focus on Operational Excellence. He made a goal to become a top-20 Restaurant in execution of that

A Holistic Approach to Operational Excellence

Operators who successfully maximize Operational Excellence do so by focusing on not just one pillar of the Create Raving Fans® strategy, but all three.

Mark Cabrera, Operator at Glenbrook Square Mall in Fort Wayne, Indiana, sees a strong correlation between effective Emotional Connections Marketing and high Operational Excellence scores. Case in point: his Business of the Day promotion, during which his team takes 36-inch Plush Cows to a different mall business each day. When retail employees dress the Cows and display them in their storefronts, they're invited to visit the Restaurant for a free meal.

"If someone's raving about an experience they had through Emotional Connections Marketing, that gets a couple of other people to come to your Restaurant," Mark explains. "That gives you another opportunity to prove and practice your Operational Excellence, which drives your scores."

Danny Daniels, Operator at Woodlawn Square FSR in Marietta, Georgia, built a best-in-class Leadership Team in order to drive improved Operational Excellence. But this strategy also helped activate 2nd Mile Service and Emotional Connections Marketing. "We have superstars who are better at 2nd Mile Service, and we try to use those people where they're best," he explains. "When our guests fall in love with us in the dining room, they fall in love with our food. It's all connected."

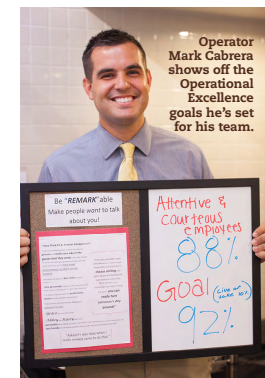
As part of their efforts to increase Operational Excellence, Team Members at Hagerstown FSR in Hagerstown, Maryland, actively monitor tables in the dining room so they're cleaned immediately when guests leave. This method has improved 2nd Mile Service and Emotional Connections Marketing, as well: When Team Members monitor tables for cleanliness, they also look for opportunities to retrieve trays and refresh beverages.

"You can't make an Emotional Connection at a dirty table," says Hagerstown FSR Operator Randy Scott. "[The pillars] are obviously connected."

Excellence in one pillar of the Create Raving Fans strategy breeds efficiency across all three. "Now that we understand and are focused more on Operational Excellence, we're never behind," Randy says. "And when you're never behind, it allows you the freedom to look for the heartfelt moments that you might otherwise miss."

pillar. Because he couldn't accomplish this goal alone, his first priority was to put together a best-in-class Leadership Team. "We had a good Leadership Team, but we did not have a great one," says Danny, who accomplished his leadership transformation in three stages:

- 1. RECRUITMENT:** To have more mature leaders in place, he hired several college graduates and established a best practice that all leaders should be at least college-aged.
- 2. DEVELOPMENT:** Danny and his general manager started spending more one-on-one time with leaders to build relationships and develop personal goals.
- 3. DEPLOYMENT:** He organized his new leaders into a High-Performance Leadership Team, which allows him to communicate vision, strategy and feedback with all of his leaders on a regular basis.



"Once our Leadership Team was built, we had the ability to influence Operational Excellence," says Danny, who broke into the top 20 at one point last year after realizing a seven-point gain in Operational Excellence over the previous year's scores.

Communication has been one way Danny's Leadership Team influences Operational Excellence. Take speed of service in the drive-thru, for example. "The leader who's closing every night sends an email that includes how fast the drive-thru was that day by daypart," Danny says. "Just talking about speed of service [in that manner] has helped us [improve it]."



Team Member Abbey Gloyd and Front Supervisor Grace Dusseau at Glenbrook Square Mall in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Everyone leaves the meeting with an action plan that will impact Operational Excellence; then they come back and report on it two weeks later.

— Randy Scott

Spreading the Word

Since becoming an Operator in 2012, Mark Cabrera has focused on improving Operational Excellence at Glenbrook Square Mall in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He began by ensuring he had the right people in place.

"Having the right people makes the biggest impact," Mark says. Armed with the old adage "birds of a feather flock together," he staffs his Restaurant largely through word of mouth.

"Once we hired two or three really great people, they became ambassadors for Chick-fil-A," Mark says. "That allowed us to attract better talent faster. And the sooner we got people into the system and aligned our values of what we do and why we do it, the sooner we saw results."

In his first year as Operator, he increased Operational Excellence scores by more than 16 points. Today, he strives to push those numbers even further by choosing an annual thematic goal for Operational Excellence—a lens through which every decision in the Restaurant is made. Last year's theme was to be Operationally Excellent. "We said, 'What does it look like to be Operationally Excellent?'" recalls Mark, whose team set a goal this year to become one of the top 10 Malls in the chain for Operational Excellence. "Once we had that picture in our minds, we said, 'What do we need to do to make sure we are Operationally Excellent?'"

The answer, Mark says, lies in systems and processes. To improve speed of service, for example, he rearranged the boards area so that a single Team Member can manage Chick-fil-A® Nuggets, Chick-n-Strips™ and Waffle Potato Fries™. He also retrained Team Members on the breading table and added a register at the front counter, along with a second bagger.

"We shifted [Team Members and equipment] into the right positions so people could be faster and more efficient," Mark says. "We did it knowing that in some cases it would increase our labor costs, but that it would essentially pay for itself in increased sales."

Accounting for Excellence

Operator Randy Scott knew he needed to focus on Operational Excellence when Regional Director Shane Benson visited Hagerstown FSR in Hagerstown, Maryland, in late 2011.

"We were just doing a quick quality run, and the sandwich he got wasn't that great," Randy says. "As Cliff Robinson would say: It wasn't 'ALL RIGHT.' It was really embarrassing for the team, so we started looking at how we were going to tackle it."

Since Shane's visit, Randy, who has been an Operator since 1991, has driven his Restaurant's Operational Excellence

score upward by more than nine points, which he attributes to a new culture of accountability. "Two years ago, we just accepted each other's performance," Randy says. "Now we're functioning much more like a team. If somebody fumbles the ball once, that might ride. But if we fumble the ball twice, we start talking about who's carrying the ball and what play we need to run next."

Still, Randy isn't satisfied with his improved Operational Excellence scores. He continues to raise the bar by ensuring that leaders are accountable. His leaders each own a different piece of the business, and every two weeks they give a presentation on their respective areas, with an analysis of Operational Excellence and an area-specific plan for improving it. "Everyone leaves the meeting with an action plan that will impact Operational Excellence; then they come back and report on it two weeks later," Randy says. "That level of accountability has been incredible for us."

Randy also emphasizes Team Members' responsibility. For that purpose, he named a director of human resources, who gives each of his 90 employees a quarterly performance review. "Having somebody in that role has been really good for us," says Randy, who recently completed a master's degree in leadership, which inspired him to move from managing employees to developing them. "If it were just me as an Operator doing it, I would struggle to get through everybody by the end of the year. Having that role means we can invest back into our Team Members and help them attain their personal goals, which helps them perform at the highest level." **CRF**

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CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Operators **Danny Daniels** and **Randy Scott** have realized substantial gains in Operational Excellence. Create asked them how they shifted gears—without driving off the road.

Create: What challenges did you encounter when you decided to raise the bar on Operational Excellence?

Danny: There were some people we had to assign to different places in the Restaurant, and others who needed to find work elsewhere. It's always difficult when you have to make personnel changes, because you're affecting people's livelihoods. Sadly, we had to let go of three pretty good people earlier this year—some of them leaders—but there were character issues, and we needed to take care of those. That has definitely been a challenge.

Randy: We want to serve people from the heart, and there was a mental battle in my mind over how you require that of people. That may be my passion, but how do I require that of someone, and is it still from the heart if it's now a system? That was holding us back. I had to battle through it.

Create: How did you solve those challenges?

Danny: In the past I've operated on the fear that I wouldn't have enough high-quality help, so I let people stick around longer than I should have. I operate more on faith now. When it's time to let somebody go, we let somebody go. And if we're a little short-handed for a little while, we're a little short-handed for a little while. What I've realized is that's just a short-term challenge. You win in the long run when you get the right people in the right places.

Randy: It would be easy to be negative and say, "You can't love people through a system" or "It's not from the heart if you require it." But I ultimately realized the only way to accomplish this is to build systems around it. So that's what I did. And ironically, we now attract people who want to serve because

of it. A year ago, we had a 16-year-old applicant. During the interview we asked, "Why do you want to work here?" He said, "Because I want to learn to serve people like I see other kids serving people." You don't expect that of a 16-year-old. It all comes back to having the right people. My people think it's actually a privilege to be able to work here and serve guests.

Create: What's your advice to other Operators who feel stuck in one gear? How can they accelerate Operational Excellence?

Danny: Start with your Leadership Team. Get people in there who are just as committed to Operational Excellence as you are. If you need to make some changes, make some changes. A guy I respect in the business taught me something. He said, "Give up almost everything on your plate except focusing on the vision and bringing other folks to focus on the day-to-day." By putting together a great Leadership Team, I was able to give up a lot of what I used to do, and now I'm able to focus on vision, strategy and culture.

Randy: There's a principle out there called the Matthew effect. Basically, there are college sports programs that year after year attract the best athletes and seem to always win. The Matthew effect says: If you've got a team of all-stars, you tend to attract all-stars. If I'm on a college team and I've never gone to a bowl game, I'm going to have a hard time recruiting that kind of talent. What's the secret to getting to a bowl game the first time? I'm not sure, honestly. It's teaching everyone the fundamentals. It's taking it one shift at a time, one day at a time, one new system at a time, and making sure you hold people accountable to your goals. Otherwise you're just spinning your wheels.



Name: Danny Daniels
Location: Woodlawn Square FSR
Marietta, Georgia



Name: Randy Scott
Location: Hagerstown FSR
Hagerstown, Maryland