

Changing face of clubs

The club industry is getting serious about the foodservice side of their businesses, writes Ken Burgin.



LAST month we looked at the impact staff training is having on the profitability and popularity of Club Food and Beverage. Clubs are now competing with pubs and restaurants for the tourist and fine-dining dollar, and this commitment to training is really bearing fruit. Is this a threat to small operators? Maybe, but the culture and atmosphere of a club will always be different to a local café or restaurant, but now the food standard is higher and there's every chance of getting a great coffee.

Six years ago I first collaborated with Ralph Kober, now chief executive officer, of the Club Managers Association Australia (CMAA) to develop an ongoing training program, focussed solely on the hospitality side of Club life. Out of that came the Clubs+ suite of training Summits and Webinar training programs.

Since that time it has been very rewarding to see the growth in skills amongst chefs, catering managers, CEOs and even club directors. There's a much more sophisticated and knowledgeable approach to food and beverage: purchasing, menu design, modern facilities, cost control and equipment. There is no doubt that good food and beverage sets the standard for a modern club's reputation, and takes attention away from the politics and controversy about gambling.

Recently, as part of an educational two day Food and Beverage Summit, I organised for a group of 60 chefs, managers, front of house and service staff to visit a special 'happy hour' event at Hurricane's Grill, Darling Harbour, followed by a visit to Fine Food Australia. A behind the scenes tour of the kitchens and other food, dining and entertainment venues at the ANZ Stadium, supported the full two-day educational program, also held at the ANZ Stadium at Homebush.

The visit to the very successful Hurricane's Grill in Darling Harbour (which also has restaurants at Bondi Beach and Top Ryde) was a highlight for many participants. The group was hosted to a delicious selection of Hurricane's Grill finger food; it was not just the superb textures and flavours, beverages and networking that were so popular, but also the insights into a very efficiently run business that orchestrates equipment, seating, cooking and menu into a great success story. Many of you know Hurricane's from the original restaurant that's been at Bondi for more than ten years.

The generous sharing of information and ideas by the manager of Hurricane's Grill, Steve Sidd, made a powerful contribution to everyone in attendance.

This restaurant has expanded to three venues, each with happy crowds of people wanting to enjoy their famous ribs, steak and barbecue specials. Volume like this can't be sustained unless there's a solid management system in place: a call centre for bookings, modern hand-held ordering systems for waiters, a well-designed bar waiting area for

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walk-in customers, and a very efficient cooking line that ensures speedy food service. Plus tightly-organised purchasing and supply lines for the huge quantities of meat and produce they use every day.

Staffing is obviously critical to Hurricanes' success, and Sidd impressed everyone with the range of in-depth training undergone by all staff (up to and including Cert. 4) and the wide range of benefits offered. This is a business that really knows how to be an 'employer of choice'.

What's ahead for your staffing in 2012? The supply of good people won't get any easier, and one-by-one your competitors are creating smarter staff management systems: online rostering and staff induction, short in-house courses and a stronger focus on career development.

There are many ways that small operators can compete with large clubs and hotels. It could be skill development through registered certificate courses, visits to trade shows, or why not take the opportunity to sit down with your team for a one-hour webinar — at your venue. Webinars are designed to be short, practical and packed with useful information.

When you login to a webinar, a screen opens on your computer or laptop, similar to a browser page, but live. You can watch and listen to the content with your speakers or a Skype headset, type in questions, or in some cases ask them live.

Whether it's on-the-job short sessions, skill development through certificate courses run by registered trainers, trade shows, conferences, or webinars which have become very popular, staff training really does boost your profits. In the new year, in collaboration with *Hospitality* magazine, we will bring you a number of new staff training online opportunities — get prepared for some highly motivational and cost effective bottom line improvements.

Remember you'll reap the rewards when you and your team are motivated, and inspired to do things differently to achieve more sales and higher profitability. It is so good for people in hospitality to get out of the kitchen and see what is going on around them.

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