



Pre-Shift Meetings Improve Service and Boost Sales So why aren't you doing them? (And doing them right?)

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This past 12 months I've conducted over six dozen training seminars for both chain and independent operators in the US, the UK and Asia. Over and over again I'm asked what I consider to be the number one thing that restaurateurs can do to reduce turnover, improve service and increase sales. The answer is simple, but the execution is hard: *make pre-shift meetings mandatory, not optional, every day.*

No matter what you call them—Alley Rallies, Pre-Meals, Q-Times, Pep-Ups, Jumpstarts—the pre-shift meeting is the best tool you have to prep and focus your team on the critical behaviors that will make the shift rewarding for both customer and crew.

Having personally conducted a few hundred pre-shift meetings in our own restaurants and having successfully taught a few thousand managers how to do it in theirs, I'd like to share some basic do's and don'ts on how to prepare, stage, and deliver dynamic pre-shift meetings that get results:

Make a plan don't fake a plan. The main reason we have pre-shift meetings is so that managers can share the focus of that shift with the team. *If you don't share a plan your team will naturally assume you don't have one.* So before the shift managers should review progress on their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and note specific area that need improvement; maybe it's in speed of service, accuracy or increasing incremental sales. Now determine how to apply that improvement to projected volume for the shift. Assess your rookie-to-veteran ratio among crew, consider the day of the week, weather, current advertising and promotions, historical sales for this date, etc. Now use a pre-shift meeting planner to capture all this information and then use it to set your shift goals. Don't have one? No problem. Download ours free on our home page at Sullivision.com. Over 20,000 restaurateurs do so every week. Then post this planner in a common area after your meeting so everyone is clear on the shift goals.

Keep it positive. A pre-shift meeting is all about energy, focus and direction. It is not the time or place to discuss negative topics or pick on someone's previous performance. Make them feel confident and clear about what they need to do individually and collectively to achieve the shift's goals.

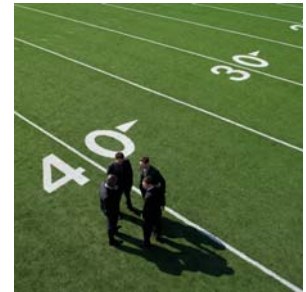
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One meeting, one issue. A common mistake managers make is trying to cover too many issues in a pre-shift meeting. Pick one focus area to emphasize and stick to it: service, selling, cleanliness, speed, accuracy, etc. You'll have plenty of other shifts this week and next to cover other important topics. Build on today's topic tomorrow, and the day after that. If you're open for lunch and dinner daily you have 729 more pre-shift meetings over the next 12 months. Do one thing really well today. Now doing something else really well tomorrow. And the next day after that. Then build on it. Do a pre-shift meeting before every day-part, not just when its busy.

K.I.S.S. Keep it short and sweet. I've seen too many managers ramble off on ten (with gusts up to fifteen) minute monologues in front of antsy, bored, or distracted servers or cooks right before a busy shift. No pre-shift meeting should last longer than five minutes in my opinion, and less than half that is ideal. Less is more. Set an egg timer and when the bell rings, the crew should be allowed to walk away. Think of these get-togethers as pre-shift "moments," (like a quarterback before a big play) not meetings, if it helps you better focus on a succinct, tight message.

Skinny the monologue, fatten the dialogue. Interactivity makes any meeting more lively and effective. Remember the 20/80 rule: managers should speak for 20% of the pre-shift meeting, crew should speak for 80% of the meeting. Briefly and energetically present the objective, opportunities, and goals for the shift. Quickly review results of last shift (along with the key learnings), and then ask team members how we'll collectively achieve this shift's goals. Don't "show and tell," listen and share. Now ask each person to repeat and review the shift goals one more time. Repetition is the mother of all learning.



Teach everyone something new each shift. The pre-shift meeting may be one of the best times to teach your team collectively, but don't forget to find opportunities throughout the shift to encourage and recognize behavior that supports and achieves shift goals. Your shift was successful when the pre-shift meeting and the experience throughout the shift results in everyone learning something new from their manager.

Never set individual sales goals for the staff. If for instance you say "Chad, I want you to sell 8 appetizers this shift." Well, those are your goals, not his. Let servers set their own goals at pre-shift sessions. You'll be surprised how often those goals will be higher than what you would have set.

Pump up the staggered shift crew too. When crew members arrived at staggered times because of labor and scheduling purposes, don't forget to focus on and energize them too. This can be done in 30 second mini pre-shift one-on-



one meetings with each individual. Train your team who come in at staggered times to review the Pre-Shift meeting planner that you post after the “bigger” meeting. Make certain that everyone’s on the bus and confident of the direction they’re heading.

Generate electricity. And finally, remember that pre-shift meetings are perfect times to pump up the energy level of your kitchen and customer-facing teams before “the big game.” Your enthusiasm for both teaching and having fun are the foundations of a great shift. This doesn’t mean you need to be loud, raucous or hyperkinetic during the pre-shift, though you can be. There are all kinds of energy, including focus, clarity, conviction and resolve. The bottom line is that if you don’t demonstrate enthusiasm and focus, it’s unlikely that the team will initiate it on their own.

Coach to the goals during the shift. The pre-shift meeting may be one of the best times to teach your team collectively, but don’t forget to find opportunities *throughout* the shift to encourage and recognize each person’s behavior that supports and achieves shift goals. Your shift was successful when the pre-shift meeting and the experience throughout the shift results in everyone learning something new from their manager.

My experience has taught me that the key to competitiveness is innovation and the key to innovation is people. Companies aren’t innovative, people are. Exchanging knowledge and sharing common goals with your team members daily makes them better. The better they are, the better the experience they create for their customers. The happier the customer, the happier the crew, and happy customers always buy more. Training is a process, not an “event.” Create a culture where learning is valued and ideas are shared. Each one teach one.

Jim Sullivan is the host and writer of the best-selling DVD *Jumpstart: How to Plan and Execute Effective Pre-Shift Meetings*, available at Sullivision.com

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