

WINTER 2022

O R E G O N

RESTAURANT & LODGING

A S S O C I A T I O N M A G A Z I N E

Bundle Up

Packages, Partnerships
and Fresh Ideas Help
Boost Business

From Food Trail to
the Vision of a Food
Innovation Center

Hospitality Heroes

Kindness in the
Workplace



Headlands Coastal Lodge & Spa, Pacific City

PHOTO COURTESY OF HEADLANDS COASTAL LODGE & SPA

KIND & EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Supporting Our Teams Through Kindness at Work



"I'm so fed up with this place - it's terrible here. I had a job interview somewhere else this morning, and honestly, I'm just about ready to walk out in the middle of my shift, and if I do, they'll have to close the place down for the day." With that, the young man working the drive-thru handed me my food, and I drove off, a little stunned. What had started as casual back and forth banter between employee and customer waiting on food had rapidly and unexpectedly devolved into a diatribe on working conditions, stress, and culture. This customer service employee, as hard-working and dedicated as he was, was at the end of his rope. I parked and sat in a nearby lot and ate my food, reflecting on the dramatic shift in work experience had by many of our team members over the past two years.

I saw aspects of my own operation and operations run by friends reflected in that recent visit to the drive-thru on the Oregon coast. The supply chain shortages that drive prices ever-upward and leave gaps in the menu due to unfulfilled orders from

broadline distributors, the overwhelm of serving a rush while understaffed, the frustration from well-intentioned customers who don't understand why we are closing early or why their favorite meal is unavailable for the third time in the past two weeks—it's a lot to manage, and each day can seemingly bring a new issue to address. At times, running a hospitality operation in this environment can feel a bit like the old TV show *MacGyver*, where it takes all of the ingenuity we can muster to come up with a solution for the day's unique challenges.

No wonder so many of our dedicated team members are struggling with our current set of industry challenges. They knew that they signed up for a hard job, but they didn't sign up for this. The proof is in the numbers - a lot of them are walking away. In August, one in 12 American hospitality workers quit their jobs. The same number left their jobs in September. If the same holds true for October, that will mean that our industry will have seen a 25 percent turnover over the past three months.

How do we as operators, managers and supervisors lead in such a situation? There's little we can do to mitigate the current external factors that are influencing our hospitality businesses so dramatically. Our focus on change must be inward. What can we do to support the teams and employees we currently have, those who still believe in the industry and see a place for themselves within it?

There is no cure-all, but there is a good place to start.

Kindness. We need to lead our teams with kindness. Kind words and actions may not solve the challenges besetting our industry, but they do position our teams to address those issues from a position of security and unity.

We already care about kindness as an industry, at least when it comes to our customers. I've noticed a fascinating trend recently. A rise in difficult customer interactions has led restaurants, grocery stores and retail outlets to take the unprecedented step of posting signs at location entrances urging customers to "be nice," "have patience," or "show kindness" to staff.

If kindness from total strangers entering our establishments matters enough to ask for it, certainly kindness among co-workers, managers, and operation leadership is worth a premium.

We spend full working days together, serving, prepping, cleaning, hosting, and cooking side-by-side, often in close quarters. We choose to invest our days, our professional interests, and energies into working with one another in hospitality. Kindness in our teams and from our leadership is critical, especially in this time of increased stress and challenge for our industry.

I've spent the past several months speaking to industry groups and trade associations as part of The Kind & Effective Workplaces Initiative, sharing ideas and strategies for building teams and leaders that work together in kindness. As I meet with operators and leaders across different parts of our industry, the need for kindness on our teams is apparent and expressed often.

Building kind and effective teams requires commitment from leaders—not just commitment written in a mission statement or employee handbook, but a real, genuine commitment to kindness

modeled in the consistent example set personally by a leader. Kindness is a generous and gracious orientation that motivates us and leads us to action, and it must be expressed and demonstrated across all aspects of our leadership practice.




For instance, if we ask for our team members to speak kindly to customers, are we first modeling that behavior by speaking kindly in the workplace?

If we ask for our team members to kindly anticipate customer needs, are we thoughtfully considering the needs of our team?

When people look at us as leaders, do they see kindness?

Kindness doesn't mean that we need to become doormats and sacrifice the needs of the organization on the altar of "being nice;" rather, kindness requires that we deeply consider the

needs of our team members (and ourselves) as an integral part of pursuing our organizational goals. When we lead in this way, we invest in our staff in such a way as to promote their long-term stability within our industry, and position them for success when they move on to whatever else comes next. They are more prepared and willing to weather a storm when surrounded by kind team members and when led by kind leaders.

While kindness is simple, there are many ways to express it effectively within our organizations to help build increasingly positive and resilient workplace cultures. Our work with The Kind & Effective Workplaces Initiative is to develop tools and train teams in ways to express organizational kindness. If you have a passion for kindness in the workplace or recognize a need for cultural transformation in your own organization, we'd love to hear from you.  JUSTIN FREEMAN, BAGEL SPHERE

About

Justin Freeman is the owner/operator of Bagel Sphere in Eugene, and a trainer and speaker with The Kind & Effective Workplaces Initiative.

Want to hear more?

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