

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'REPAIR'

As if something were broken? . . . which implies failure? . . . - No. I considered calling this section 'Adjusting an Existing Restaurant' and 'Moving on in an Existing Restaurant' but the simple truth is none of us look for help until we are well past the adjustment point.

I have never had a client whose opening line was "Things are grand but I thought I would see if there weren't some way I could spend some of my hard earned money to get advice about fixing something that, in my judgment, is moving along just swimmingly."

If you have an existing restaurant that is open and running, then you have figured out the variables and how to manipulate them. That doesn't mean the beast isn't going to shape shift on you though. And that is probably what has happened recently. So Repair can mean several things:

- 1) you have outlived a trend;
- 2) ingredient price increases have pushed your price points out of your competition range;
- 3) your consumer base or their eating habits have shifted since you opened;
- 4) your kitchen has changed and recipes have gotten sloppy;
- 5) your physical plant is worn or out-dated;
- 6) competitors have moved in and eaten away at your sales base;
- 7) you have made a series of small changes that have finally eroded your identity.

I could go on - each place has it's own tale to tell. The good news is that they all stem from one common dynamic: the crispness has bled out of your concept. And in today's market only the terribly fit survive.

I am here to tell you that I do not have the answers. You have them - that's the good news. I can help you access them. The more we live with anything we lose sight of its actual nature. That reality gap leads to Diner Dissonance, and to decline.

So you may think the problem lies in the menu, or the staff, or the competition, but probably it lies in all of them, as they all define the concept. Through a series of ideation sessions, I can help you re-see the original concept, what must change and what must not, in order for it to still be viable this many years after your initial success.

Let's walk through the steps of Repairing your place.

THE FIRST STEP - Performance Analysis

The first step is to acknowledge that repairing an existing restaurant is the same as opening a new one. The only difference is you have a place and a staff.

Before meaningful intervention and assistance can be offered, it is of paramount importance to engage in an open and candid discussion with the owner/operator as to their description of the situation. There are always two key indicators involved in assessing a current operation:

the emotional, intuitive and/or perceptive view of the situation, and the actual data, e.g. POS reports, P & L's, sales data.

Without understanding what is being felt and also what, in reality, is occurring (numbers don't lie), a solution cannot be crafted. So the Performance Analysis must include both. If an operator does not have any data available, this is typically a first indication of what at least part of the problem is.

THE SECOND STEP - Thorough Product Tastings

It is quite common for an operator to assume that their food is the problem. Often it is, but rarely is it the only issue sabotaging profit and repeat customers. To assure what role the food is playing, however, it is critical to assess the following aspects of the menu via a thorough menu tasting with key restaurant stakeholders present:

The food being served

- Plate value perception-to-selling price ratio
- Flavor profiles
- Preparation excellence
- Presentation style
- Plateware style
- Temperature

The Menu Composition

- Assure menu items are synergistic to the concept
- Analyze menu lay-out, item names and menu descriptions
- Study price point logic amongst items

Line Flow

- Station balance
- Problematic items that slow line speed
- Equipment adequacy and positioning
- Kitchen design
- Inventory Utilization and cross-over

It may be useful to revisit the Menu and Recipe segment of the opening process. At this point a major flaw in the system may be revealed. After the new menu has been established, every thing must be costed out. Too many operations do not have a Recipe Manual. This means there is no standard of production as the kitchen staff morphs over time. Customers pick up on this immediately. After every production and presentation recipe has been costed, move to the Menu Pricing segment.

Oh yes, this includes the bar. FAR too often the bar is allowed to run on its own agenda. There must be integrity from front door to back door for a place to be that Third Great Place we all hope to find in our favorite restaurant.

THE THIRD STEP

Now comes staff re-training. Essential to establishing new habits of service, without which, the customer will not be re-won.

[click on Step by Step Graphic to see this process in a modular graphic format.]