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## **Get Engaged in Your F&B Operations – Or We Will be Engaged in a Search!**

By Lisa Carroll

You've heard the national trends – members are joining clubs because of the social aspects of membership – no longer are they joining just "for the golf." Some members play tennis, some members play golf, but all members eat – and if not at your club, then somewhere else.

To maintain the vitality and legacy of the club (as well as replenish the membership numbers) clubs continue to court younger, family-centric members. Statistics show that younger members eat out more often and are looking for more exotic flavors. It is essential that clubs are responsive to these changing dining trends.

### **Focus on F&B**

It isn't surprising then that the club's F&B operations are nearly always targeted for action in the strategic plans that we facilitate. Jack Sullivan, our strategic planning guru, states "food and beverage is most always listed as important and often as a key strategic issue. Why? [It is] because everyone eats and often dines at the club. Thus the GM who is able to bridge all of the different [dining] desires and needs has a real asset in his or her tool box."

Successful F&B experience is a core competency that search committees require in their GM candidates. Nearly every search committee that we have partnered with in the last five years has required a strong background and/or successful track record in F&B operations. Often searches are conducted because the previous GM did not have F&B experience and didn't put forth the effort to make it a priority.

If you entered the wonderful world of private clubs through another side of the business, such as golf or fitness, then you need to embrace and immerse yourself in the F&B operations to survive and excel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century club world. If you don't have solid experience, hire the right F&B managers, educate yourself and get more engaged with your F&B team.

### **Educate Yourself**

Gather a wealth of information about F&B operations and dining preferences from your members using member satisfaction surveys, comment cards presented after dining, email requests for feedback following a dining or event experience, and discussions at new member orientation meetings. Use the data to get a solid read on where your F&B operations are now and where they need to go.

Read F&B industry periodicals to get a feel for current dining trends in not just club dining, but your other competitors – local restaurants and chains. Take advantage of the millions of R&D dollars spent by major restaurant brands by reviewing *Nation's Restaurant News* and similar publications.

Use your dining allowance to its full extent each month – benchmark and try new restaurants. Does your F&B team get a dining allowance? They should if they don't; especially if you want them to really lead the F&B departments that they manage.

### **Engage Your Team**

Anything you can do to show your engagement in the team pays off ten-fold with the team's commitment to the club. Attend ACF meetings with your chef. Spend more time in the kitchen and dining rooms. Meet regularly with the team. Observe, ask questions, and learn.

One great way to promote engagement in F&B across service lines is to participate in a little friendly competition. Local CMAA, HFTP and ACF chapters in Florida hold a culinary competition in which each club team is comprised of a CMAA, HFTP, and ACF member. The teams try to "out-cook" the other clubs' teams. It is a great way to engage those participating and unites the rest of the team who cheer their comrades on. Consider holding a similar competition at your club and invite staff or members to observe and enjoy.

If F&B operations aren't your forte, there is hope. While these suggestions won't guarantee success, they will certainly help to improve your club's responsiveness to member dining needs and engage you and your team in the continual improvement and success of F&B operations. Strength in F&B management is imperative for your continued employment at your current club and your viability for employment at a future club.

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