

Press

CoffeeTrainers.com featured in **Specialty Coffee Retailer Magazine**

Staff Training: Serving up Success

By Melissa Niksic



It doesn't matter if your coffee shop has an amazing house blend or the best latte in town. If the service at your location is subpar, your customers will remember that and nothing else.

At any establishment, staff members are performing right at the front lines, making an immediate impression on guests. Locations that invest in both initial and ongoing training opportunities are often those whose customers experience the best overall service. Whether you oversee the training process yourself, utilize web-based or other interactive platforms to maximize employee engagement, or bring in an external consulting team to assist, it's essential that your operation have a strategic training plan in place.

Training begins before day one

Many retailers assume that staff training starts the first day an employee arrives on the job. However, many industry professionals say that owners and managers should begin thinking about training before they even embark on the hiring process. Consider what types of people are most likely to thrive in your retail environment. Those are the people you want to make sure to hire in the first place: the ones who will fit in and be successful.

Master coffee expert and successful entrepreneur John Graves developed CoffeeTrainers.com, a Los Angeles-based company that offers concise one-on-one barista training (in just one day) and consultations by the hour or half hour by phone or in person.

CoffeeTrainers.com hands-on barista training includes a complete Barista Recipe Guide which comes in handy – even after training and when on the job. A successful coffee shop entrepreneur himself, John also offers a Supplies and Resources Guide which is helpful to those wishing to start a coffee shop business. The information is invaluable and even provides basic costs for everything you'll need to start your operation. The guide is particularly helpful when writing a business plan, as well as provides store design advice, licenses and food certification requirements, contacts for builders, wholesale coffee equipment and coffee bean suppliers, and basic start-up costs and fees. If you want answers about the coffee business, John says, "Ask me any question and I will provide the answer. I don't candy coat the business of coffee though I can proudly say that every person I've trained who wanted to start their own coffee business has had success in the coffee shop business."

John can also help with general staff training. He suggests that retailers have staff training in mind during the initial stages of the employee hiring phase. "Make sure you hire engaging people," says John. "You want your staff members to be friendly, well-groomed, welcoming, and able to effectively engage with your customers so those customers turn into repeat customers."

For many coffee retailers, training can be divided into two main components: drink preparation and customer service. On the customer service side, it's important to stress the same types of good customer service skills necessary in every retail environment: greeting customers with a

smile, engaging them in conversation, being friendly, and being courteous. However, there's one key element to good customer service in a coffee shop that isn't necessarily a huge factor in every other industry: speed.

The majority of coffee consumers have a grab-and-go mentality. Most of them don't plan on sticking around your shop for a long while. They're on their way to work or have a quick break in their day, and they ducked into your store intending to buy their drink and be on the road again in a few minutes time. These people don't want to stand in long lines or wait 15 minutes while their drink is being prepared. Speed is of the essence when it comes to great customer service, and unfortunately that's not something most baristas can learn overnight. Retailers need to be realistic in their expectations when it comes to staff training, giving baristas time to learn the ins and outs of drink preparation before they are able to master the all-important efficiency skill.

Explore outside resources

CoffeeTrainers.com provides hands-on barista training on state-of-the-art NSF coffee equipment and one-on-one consultations by the hour or half hour for anyone interested in starting their own coffee shop or wishing to work in the industry. Whether you're an established retailer looking to enhance staff training programs or an individual looking to deepen professional knowledge of the industry, we work one-on-one with each client, unlike all the other training facilities. Our training fees also cost far less and we don't prolong hands-on training. It doesn't take one week to learn to make the drinks. It takes about 4-6 hours of intense hands-on training and because we provide a barista recipe manual to each client we train, they can reference to the guide any time while on the job.

CoffeeTrainers.com Essential Employee Training Tips

If you're thinking about ways to revitalize your staff training programs, here are some basic tips to keep in mind:

Be courteous. A personable staff member is great, but make sure your team members are also well-versed in the art of courtesy and good customer service.

Good training results in a good end product. Everyone knows that the most important attribute of any coffee shop is its product. Training is an essential part of that process. Baristas need to know how to correctly prepare and serve your products. Additionally, staff members should be trained on how to customize drinks based on customers' personal preferences.

Appearances count. Make sure to stress the importance of having a clean apron every morning, washing hands regularly, and being well-groomed. These are essential in the coffee industry, where staff members are dealing with drinks and food.

Safety first. Working in a coffee shop can be dangerous. If a barista is making a hot drink and turns away for even a second, he or she could end up burning themselves. Train your staff members to keep their eyes on the drinks at all times. Tell them that even if a customer is clamoring for their attention, it's okay to tell them, "*I'll be with you in just a moment*" until the drink preparation is complete.

Make suggestions. Graves recalls being in a coffee shop recently and witnessed a customer inquiring about a chocolate muffin. The server behind the counter apologized, stating that they were out of chocolate muffins. "I approached the barista and mentioned to him that what he should have done was suggest that the customer try a chocolate chip cookie or a brownie instead," Graves says. "It was a missed opportunity for a larger sale. The customer was obviously

in the mood for chocolate or for something sweet. Your staff should never just send them away without suggesting another product that the customer might end up liking even more.”

Cross-train, cross-train, cross-train. Every staff member in your store should know how to do everything, from preparing drinks to working the register to restocking product.

Don't just focus on the newbies. Staff members who have been with you for some time still need opportunities to ask questions and be informed of new policies. Schedule a monthly staff meeting to go over new business with your team, answer any questions, and address any concerns of your own.

Be present. No one will ever care about your business more than you will. It's important for store owners to spend as much time in their stores as possible, making sure that staff members adhere to their established standards.

Have a plan. Any plan! Just make sure there is an official training system in place that everyone at your location is following. “You should have a standardized checklist and barista recipes that everyone in your store is following during the training process to ensure consistency.”

Stay connected. Coffee is a competitive industry, but it's important to network with other retailers to share success stories and offer helpful suggestions. Participate in organizations like the SCAA and get to know your fellow retailers. You might walk away with some great tips on training and many other topics as well. Also, stay connected with the SCAA via its Face book and Twitter channels to learn about upcoming professional development opportunities.