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The Food is the Focus  
*But Communication is Key*

By Lisa Carroll

How do you ensure consistent, innovative, high quality and cutting edge practices in your culinary program? Take a page out of the Detroit Athletic Club's (DAC) book and make sure to communicate the club mission, vision, and core values to all of your front line employees.

The DAC, which celebrated its 126<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, is a 13-time winner of Metropolitan Detroit's 101 Best & Brightest Companies to Work For, and also has earned Michigan Quality Council's Quality Leadership Award.

Executive Chef Kevin Brennan leads an impressive team of 40 culinarians and 28 stewards, including five certified executive chefs who provide DAC's members their dining experience with an \$8.5 million food and beverage operation.

So how does such a large operation communicate club vision, mission and values so that it permeates through all levels of the kitchen staff?

"The food is the focus." That's the fundamental concept says Brennan, and focus they do using communication, consistency and critical club measurement tools to ensure success.

The hallmark of the DAC's approach to food quality is its service guarantee system. Each of the five culinary departments has its own distinct statement of purpose and list of service guarantees that relate to the DAC's vision, mission and core values. The guarantees are designed to ensure consistent performance at all staffing levels, with new or long time employees.

The DAC has a club-wide focus on learning and internal certifications specific to each department, and culinary is no different. This consistent performance process (CPP) drives the club's performance excellence process (PEP), which helps ensure constant improvement and successful delivery of the service guarantees to members of the club.

So how do you relay and reinforce this information from the managers to the front line employees?

The human resources department conducts a formal orientation, and after being immersed in the club's culture, new hires are now ready for the culinary department's training. Each new employee follows a detailed training plan that includes property knowledge as well as a full range of standards and procedures necessary to be successful in the job.

To reinforce the importance of their professional commitment, each employee receives a special card with DAC's vision statement, mission statement and core values along with their department's specific statement of purpose and service guarantees.

This information is truly as important as any communications effort you might normally expect in a kitchen like the DAC's. Other regular communication touch points center on new menu items (during training sessions), recipe cards and recipe books with pictures; communicating and reviewing BEO's prior to and during events; writing detailed post-event reports by kitchen and FOH staff (actually they have some great templates that they would be happy to share), and end of day recaps.

DAC ensures its service guarantees remain in the forefront of the kitchen staff's minds through mandatory monthly performance excellence process (PEP) meetings.

These start by reminding employees of the value the club puts on them through its workplace philosophy of "safe, respected and needed." Then the team reviews the month's CPP measures and develops corrective actions for issues that might have occurred.

Sometimes the team is re-certified to make sure all members are trained and understand things like club attendance policies, as well as a review of both positive and negative issues.

The chef provides "big picture" information, including financial details, about what is happening at the club, all designed to give the team a feeling of accomplishment, contribution, and buy-in as well as showing them how their work contributes to the club's bottom line.

Does your club have a mission statement, vision statement and core values? If so, how well and how often are they communicated to your team – from the department heads to line staff?

Can your communications effort benefit by translating the club's mission statement into departmental statements of purpose and a list of department-specific service guarantees?

Consider tasking your department heads with that effort by gathering input and buy-in from their teams to come up with their own service guarantees.

*Lisa Carroll is a search executive with Kopplin & Kuebler, LLC, an executive recruiting firm providing services to the private club industry. The company has offices in Scottsdale, Jupiter, Denver and Atlanta. She can be contacted at (561) 596-1123 and at [lisa@kopplinandkuebler.com](mailto:lisa@kopplinandkuebler.com).*