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The *skills* of the trade

Keeping your staff trained and up-to-date on the latest coffee innovations is an important part of running a café.

The secret to any café's success is its people. It's no longer enough to simply find the right staff – you then need to retain them and ensure they're performing at their best. With a global coffee culture and its associated techniques, and trends that are constantly evolving, it can be a challenge to keep pace with change. But to remain competitive, café owners need to be ahead of the eight-ball to ensure their baristas are not only making consistently great coffee, but are also up to scratch on the latest developments in the coffee world.

As a café owner, training needs to be so much more than an afterthought. It needs to be a central part of your café's culture. Well-trained staff ensure consistently great coffee, the essential starting point for any café that wants to be competitive. Follow these tips to ensure the people at the heart of your business are learning, growing, and sticking with your business for the long haul.

HIRE PASSION

Hiring the right people is such a key part of a café's success. It's worth going over the importance of this in your business plan. Hire people that share the same passion for quality that you as an owner have. Look for attitude, work ethic and above all, a passion for making great coffee and providing extraordinary customer service. Found yourself with staff that are full of passion but lacking in experience? Courses such as Essence of Espresso, at the Danes Gourmet Coffee Institute, provide a thorough breakdown of the basics of great coffee-making.

HOLD A CUPPING SESSION

Making great coffee means being able to identify great coffee. The best baristas are those who are continually developing their palate. Whether it's in-house or at a training facility, a cupping session is a great way to help baristas do this by introducing them to different roasts and origins, and helping them identify and learn to describe nuances in taste.



ENCOURAGE COMPETITIONS

Barista competitions are a great way to get your staff to dig deeper. These competitions will force your baristas to refine and polish their skills. Barista competitions can often serve as a wake-up call to baristas who feel they've already learnt all there is to know. Competing in front of a panel of experts is the perfect forum to get your barista's skills under the microscope, which can be a humbling experience!

Barista events are also a great place to learn about new trends and to see what is happening outside of your own café. For those interested in competing, a latte art course is a fun way for baristas to add to their skill repertoire and learn techniques which can then be used in competition.

ENSURE YOU LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Once your staff have gone through formal training, it's up to you to lead by example on a regular basis. This means setting the bar high, and as a café owner, getting your hands dirty and ensuring your own work practices and coffee-making techniques are near-perfect at all times.

It is important for your employees to see you working hard, consistently upholding high standards. The standard of any café is only as good as its owner or manager.

CREATE A CULTURE OF LEARNING

Training is not something which wraps up within the first session. You need to instill the value of learning among your staff in order to maintain high standards, and to keep them motivated. Coffee is a lifelong passion, with so much to learn, and you need to instill the hunger to learn in your staff.

There are so many courses available where they can pick up new skills, not to mention a whole virtual world of free education. And don't be selfish! Share your knowledge with them at every opportunity – you will get back so much more in return.