

Quality Control's Impact on the Guest Experience & Bottom Line

By Mark Kelnhofer, MBA

Mark Kelnhofer is the President and CEO of Return On Ingredients LLC and has over 20 years in management accounting experience including ten years in restaurant industry. He is an international speaker on recipe costing and menu engineering. He can be reached at (614) 558-2239 and Mark@ReturnOnIngredients.com.



Quality control is an important process in our industry. It doesn't take much to move the needle on cost percentages, especially if you are a restaurant operation that is lower in volume (< \$1m). In order to reduce cost and waste, a proper quality control process should be in place. Too many times this process is not practiced and as a result has a financial impact on our bottom lines. There are several areas where processes and practices should be put in place: at the back door during our deliveries, the expo line and each station.

Quality control's first line of defense is with the back door checking incoming deliveries. Ideally, each item should have a specification sheet. This sheet should include quite a few expectations to the location including possible grades, sizes, tolerances, color and possible approved substitutes. If possible, even a photo showing these requirements can have a huge impact on the checker's ability to ensure quality.

When the product arrives at the back door, the checker should get a copy of the packing list and typically the invoice will be there as well. Quality control is more than just checking the quantities ordered versus quantities received, although this should be part of the process. Some of the best practices in the industry, especially with products that are fresh and have short shelf lives (i.e. produce), involve actually opening boxes. That's the only true method to check the quality of the product versus the specifications on the product sheet. Too many times this visual and physical check does not get completed and we find out long after the driver has departed that we have a quality issue. At that point what normally happens is that the product is discarded. As a result, waste and inefficiency is created for the company and becomes a cost for the company.

The second area where quality control is implemented is at the expo station

checking all menu items before they are presented to the guest. Typically this is conducted by the executive chef, sous chef or sometimes the general manager. Generally what they are looking for is that the presentation and temperature match the recipe requirements. This process assists in the enforcement of the recipe standard. Depending on how loose or how tight the enforcement is will determine how consistent your product will be for the guest. You are creating a discipline internally that only the highest level of quality will be accepted. If you lower the bar or standard, your quality and expectations will not be met nor will the guests'. Menu items that are presented that don't meet your quality standards should be sent back to the line. Your expectations should be well documented through the recipe. The more detail in the recipe the better it will be understood what the deliverable is.

The third area, and most powerful, is the self checking quality control of the line employees. When enforcing a stringent standard at the expo line, you then create the self checking discipline on the line. Once the line knows about the expectations, they become more disciplined and conduct their own quality control check before they present it to the expo counter. Quality control becomes part of the culture of the company. It is a powerful thing to have it resonate all the way to the line personnel. When this is in place, you can sense the pride that they have in what they do.

Amazingly, many operators do not practice good quality control processes. Ultimately, the quality control process ensures that the quality, consistency, presentation and flavor profile are at their highest expectation and that the guest experience is a memorable one. When this occurs, not only will you create a repeat guest opportunity but also ensure that the bottom line for the company is not suffering due to lack of controls. Anytime we can reduce waste and inefficiency, it should be taken. These practices can only improve the bottom line of our financial health.

Las Vegas Wine & Food Festival at Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa

vegaswineandfood.com



Photos by Junitia Avella