



In The Trenches

By Jim Milliken – Wheat State Pizza

OFFICIAL
SPEAKER
PMQ'S ORLANDO
PIZZA SHOW



AVOIDING CONFUSION WITH STANDARD WORK SYSTEMS

I'd like to tell you about a situation I've just experienced while in the process of expanding and opening my second store. While building the store I ran into a roadblock. The roadblock was not a hurdle that couldn't be overcome, but it was a hurdle nonetheless and I feel there is an importance in the sharing of this information with you. Surprisingly, the problems weren't with location number two, but rather with location number one. Read on and I'll explain further:

For many years, as a store manager and operator, I've learned to develop good communication skills. It's a practice I would use on a day-to-day basis to the point where my people would tell me I over-train (if you can believe that). Every day in my stores I would find a situation where I would rattle off some kind of training philosophy based on my experiences or give feedback to my managers so they could better understand how to manage a pizza operation. I knew it was important that they understood exactly how I viewed things and exactly how I wanted things done so there would be no guesswork on their part as to what was expected of them. I firmly believed (and still do) that preparedness is crucial in the success of any business.

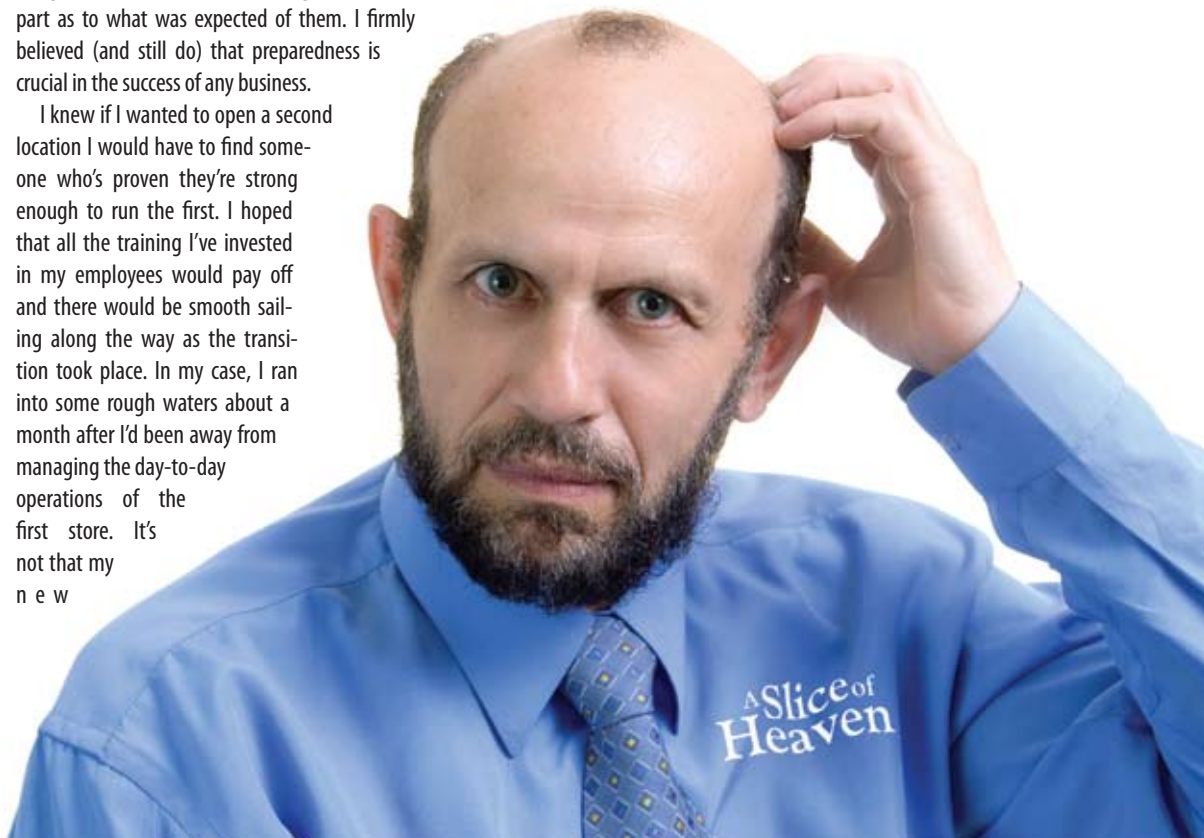
I knew if I wanted to open a second location I would have to find someone who's proven they're strong enough to run the first. I hoped that all the training I've invested in my employees would pay off and there would be smooth sailing along the way as the transition took place. In my case, I ran into some rough waters about a month after I'd been away from managing the day-to-day operations of the first store. It's not that my new

manager wasn't running quality numbers or practicing good sales-building techniques, because he was actually doing fine with that. The problem was with the actual management of the store, which puzzled me because he'd always shown strong operational skills while he was training as my assistant.

After months of pounding a never-ending stream of information into my senior assistant in store number one, it was obvious that he was really starting to develop as a manager and I was proud of how far he had come. I knew it was time to pass the torch and have him take over operations so I could focus on expansion, so I promoted him to general manager.

Here's where I ran into my problems:

About a month into his tenure of running the first store I decided to pay my new general manager a visit. Instead of going into the production area I chose to sit back and observe the way it was running from the dining room to get a glimpse of operations from a customer's point of view. I noticed,



“I also noticed that since I left the day-to-day operations of the store a few weeks back, the store had slowly gotten cluttered, looked unorganized, and some of the newer people didn’t seem to have a grasp on their job description. It was a little concerning so after the rush I decided to ask a couple new people exactly what their job description was. To my surprise, they really couldn’t give me an exact answer because they just weren’t sure.”

- Jim Milliken, Wheat State Pizza

while running rather efficiently, the store seemed to be on the edge of losing control. I also noticed that since I left the day-to-day operations of the store a few weeks back, the store had slowly gotten cluttered, looked unorganized, and some of the newer people didn’t seem to have a grasp on their job description. After the rush I decided to ask a couple new people exactly what their job description was. To my surprise, they really couldn’t give me an exact answer because they just weren’t sure. I also noticed that the staffing levels had dropped since I’d been there. Just four weeks earlier we had 18 employees, of which 10 were delivery drivers. The staffing levels were now at 11, of which six were drivers. For my operation, six drivers on the schedule translates to the store being dangerously close to complete chaos. I talked to my general manager about this and he was just as disappointed as I was and couldn’t explain why he was losing control or why he was losing people. I knew he was overwhelmed and also that he needed help so I decided to jump back in and see what I could do to lend a hand. I decided I needed to have a talk with the staff to get to the bottom of this new problem so I told my manager we needed to call a crew meeting. He put up signs the week leading up to the meeting so that everyone would know about it.

I showed up for the meeting on a Saturday morning and was disappointed to see less than half our crew had shown up. The turnout immediately put up a red flag and showed either a lack of respect for the management staff or that they simply didn’t care. Either way, it wasn’t the turnout I was expecting because most crew meetings produced at least 90% attendance in the past. Though disappointed, I wasn’t going to let this deter me from finding out what was going on. After brief introductions and announcements I told the crew we were going to have a little training session and wanted to ask them a few questions. I started with the newest person at the meeting and asked him, “What exactly are your job duties here?” He of course stumbled his way through a half-right answer, but I could tell he wasn’t sure. I then asked the other newer employees the same question and nobody really got it right. I then went to the veterans who’d been there a while and they of course chimed in with their entire job description, along with everyone else’s. It was great that they knew this but one startling fact hit me like a ton of bricks: There was no training going on in the store! The veterans knew, but they weren’t passing the information to the new people. My manager knew, but he wasn’t passing on the information either. It seemed as though the lines of commu-

nication ceased the day I left the store. I trained my manager on the importance of understanding how a pizza operation is to be run, but did I teach him the importance of relaying this information to others? I started to feel like I’d failed him and the reason he was going through this hard transition was purely my fault. Another observation I made was that while I was running the day-to-day operations of the store we had standards in place. However, since I left, those standards slowly started to fade away. I’d taken it for granted that the system we had in place would carry over after I’d gone. Boy was I wrong. After thanking everyone for showing up at the meeting I had another meeting with my management staff to discuss the information we’d just gathered.

We had a problem in the store and it needed to be fixed. Collectively, we decided that we needed to re-introduce ourselves and our crew to the standards we’d set at the onset of this business. We decided that nothing would be taken for granted. There would be a standard for everything from cleaning procedures to phone etiquette. All shelves would be labeled and have a specific place for everything. The days of looking all over the store for that lost cartop sign cord would be over. Along with the re-introduction of standards it was decided there would be a new emphasis on training. What was the use of having standards if you can’t relay this information to the new people who needed it? Our goals were set.

In the days and weeks following the meeting there was a newfound emphasis on training and the sharing of information needed to achieve success. There was a new attitude in the store and it was a positive one. The turnover practically stopped and the store was efficient and running well. It was clean and organized and the borderline chaos was a just a memory. Even sales levels started to improve.

My manager was taught how to run a store. However, there he was, managing this store with a huge database of knowledge packed in his brain but somehow... somehow, he didn’t learn the most important aspect of his job: sharing the information. It’s fixed now but it was a lesson learned. Maybe my lesson can help you in your stores. The lesson? Share the information.

If your people aren’t told when, how, and where to do things, you’re only making it harder on yourself. If you don’t have standards in place, set them. Everyone in this business wants structure. It’s up to you to provide it for them.

PMQ’s Pizza Magazine