

Franchise staff training essential to success



By [Nicolas De Sousa](#)

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Skills training and development ultimately contributes to the local and national GDP and provides an important element for the quality of one's franchise brand. On the other side, the repercussions of inefficient service or lack of training can be devastating for a brand and will provide no positive contribution to the community.

Improving the skills of franchise employees is not only vital for the overall success of the franchisor's brand, but it is also beneficial to the employees themselves and the community at large. Employees carry out perhaps the most important function in the franchise chain and proper training is vital particularly in high-risk environments such as fast-food outlets.

Front-of-house employees are also brand ambassadors, as the face of the brand to all customers who visit a franchise store. This makes thorough and comprehensive training of staff essential for the success of a franchise store.

Recruitment stage critical

However, before the training process can begin, one has to recruit the right kind of people into the business. During the interview and screening process, it is most important to look out for a positive and motivated attitude. Although factors such as experience and business understanding are important and valuable, these skills can be learned, provided candidates are willing to be trained and improve their skills.

Attitude is everything, and is not nearly as easy to instil in an employee, as is standardised operational skills. This is important, as a good attitude will indicate that the candidate would be able to work in a team-oriented environment, which is mostly how staff in a franchise outlet need to function. Attitude is a vital attribute in any kind of business.

Once one has one's staff in place, the next important step is to gauge their level of understanding and competence and commence a relevant training programme. It is the responsibility of the franchisor to provide an in-depth operations manual and any other useful material, such as checklists, on which training is based, for a franchisee to refer back to later.

Training techniques

There are various training techniques available, such as online self-training courses, but I believe that face-to-face interaction with staff is the most effective method. In this environment, one is able to engage with the particular employee effectively and assist him or her in grasping and understanding concepts. One is also able to carry out interactive activities such as role-playing, which allows the franchisor a far better picture of a person's capabilities and the employee a much more intensive and beneficial learning environment.

Training should also be as extensive as possible, covering a variety of important franchise elements to give staff a far more grounded base of understanding, while also providing context for the brand. Even for a food-oriented franchise, subjects such as marketing, finance & business management, cleanliness & hygiene etc should be included and the obvious areas, such as food preparation and customer service, no matter where the particular staff member will be operating within the hierarchy.

Some of these areas of training should be carried out in a classroom environment, preferably at the franchisor's head office, as this also creates the ideal opportunity to introduce new employees to the company's history, mission and general ethos. Although this phase of training would take place in a classroom-style setting, it is still important to engage with trainees and keep them interested by using different presentations throughout the lessons, such as video, lecture-style and practical demonstrations. It is also important to have as many of one's head office team members involved in the sessions as possible, as this helps to build relationships and create connections throughout your workforce.

Ops manual textbook

Depending on the extensiveness of training, the following sessions should be carried out over a number of days or weeks at the store location itself. The operations manual should be used as a textbook throughout these sessions and the training agenda should be based on its format. Often, during the first session or two, certain factors will become apparent and one may need to adjust one's training agenda to address particular needs. This is of course recommended, however it is also important not to side-track too much and to still ensure all the basics are covered. Also, allocate enough time for Q&A sessions during training, as this is an important part of making sure each employee is comfortable with the content.

Make sure one has enough trainers in these sessions to provide each staff member with the necessary attention. As each person will have varying levels of skills and experience, it is essential that they each require individualised assessment and guidance. Training is one of the most important and necessary investments for franchisors and it is vital to ensure it is being carried out effectively.

The course should end with an in-depth examination, which includes both theoretical and practical sections. One will then be able to assess the new skill-level of one's employees and decide if they have received the sufficient understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the operation.

Once in-depth and comprehensive training has been carried out, franchisors should be mindful that actually beginning operations in reality could still be quite stressful and challenging for the team in-store. We ensure that a member of head office, often one of the directors themselves, is present during the opening day, sometimes for the first few days. One's franchisee staff need to know that one is there for them, that one is invested in them and available to help them become a successful business. This kind of security can only be fostered through authentic, hands-on involvement of the franchisor.

Assessment, inspection

A few weeks after training has been completed and the store has begun operating in earnest, a follow up assessment and inspection should be conducted by the franchisor and feedback should be given to the staff. Depending on the results, a refresher course should be provided. New training update sessions and workshops should also be held regularly, and on an on-going basis. These sessions provide the added benefit of networking for employees, ensuring relationships are maintained and new ones are formed.

Training should never be seen as a once-off exercise. True skill development means constantly updating and keeping abreast of trends and changes in the business. We feel strongly that training should be an on-going activity between the franchisor and their employees throughout the duration of their operation. This will also accommodate new staff members who join the system, a common occurrence in a high staff-turnover industry like franchising.

I cannot impress enough on the value of training for all stakeholders in a franchise organisation and can testify from experience that, while it is common for employees in franchises to receive insufficient skill development from franchisors,

there is no such thing as too much training.

ABOUT NICOLAS DE SOUSA

Nicolas De Sousa is Marketing Director at Traditional Brands. A master of Marketing and Business Administration with varied international experience within internationally recognized corporations adds a clear backing of experience within his favoured fields within retail and marketing, PR management, logistics and finance. He joined the brand in 2007 adding an alternative to the company's then current approach of which "Old Fashioned" Fish and Chips had so often been comfortable with. Contact details: [website](http://www.traditionalbrands.co.za)

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