

Structure for “the Groove” and Avoid “the Rut”

Every new General Manager has tackled the challenges of their position with vision, vigor, and enthusiasm to address the expressed concerns of the board or owners and the perceived needs of customers/guests/members. It’s something we’ve all experienced – analyzing the operation, discovering the problems, formulating a plan of action, winning the support of employees for the new agenda, and executing to completion.

While there are few things as satisfying as overcoming obstacles to improve a hospitality operation, the larger challenge that never goes away is how to keep the spirit of renewal alive over time. This is so because it seems that despite whatever progress is made, things still fall apart, old habits die hard and new initiatives, no matter how exciting, grow stale and uninspiring in short order. It is just too easy for your “in-the-groove” operation to backslide into that same ol’, same ol’ rut.

So what is the conscientious manager to do to break through the seemingly endless cycle of groove and rut? The simple answer is to instill a strong sense of constant renewal in the enterprise’s culture. While this is easily said, the reality of making it happen is far more complex and challenging requiring a significant degree of organizational structure and focus. Here are some things to consider:

- Make ongoing renewal a priority in departmental expectations and departmental plans, ensuring that department heads spell out goals and specific steps to keep each operation’s events and activities fresh and compelling. *Tools:* [Annual club planning](#), *individual work plans*, *measurable accountabilities*, and *accountability for performance*.
- Focus on the fundamentals of service and service delivery with ongoing reminders to managers and employees alike. As Mac Anderson says, “The three keys to inspiring . . . service – Reinforce, Reinforce, Reinforce.” *Tools:* [On the Go Training](#), [Daily Huddles](#), [Notable Quotables](#)
- In each department encourage employee feedback on what works and what doesn’t. As prominent technology and entrepreneur blogger Bill Robinson says, “To be able to regularly solicit, capture and execute upon the strong ideas of those on the front lines who really know what the customers want will be the panacea for the 21st century business world.” Act on the information your employees bring you to continually improve all aspects of the operation – organization, planning, execution, training, service, and service delivery. *Tools:* [Continual Process Improvement](#)
- Using the principles of Service-Based Leadership, work continually toward the power of employee empowerment. An entire staff that understands what must be done, how to do it, and acts without fear of making mistakes and repercussions will bring far more to bear on success and renewal than the efforts of a handful of managers and supervisors. *Tools:* [Leadership on the Line](#), [The Power of Employee Empowerment](#)
- Use every opportunity of interaction with employees to reinforce organizational values and the culture of service. Whether it’s pre-shift meetings, the habit of daily huddles, or casual conversations and direction throughout the workday, managers must constantly “spread the gospel” by word AND deed. While the message is important, there is no substitute for example – not only in how leaders interact with customers/guests/members, but more importantly how they interact with their employees. There is no substitute for the example of leadership. “A leader

leads by example, whether he intends to or not.” *Tools: [The Bully Pulpit](#), [Daily Huddles](#), [Notable Quotables](#), [Service-Based Leadership](#)*

- Seek the feedback of your customers/guests/members. Ultimately it’s their perception of your operation that guarantees success. Feedback comes in many forms – formal surveys, departmental comment cards, personal interactions, AND benchmarking customer spending habits within each department. All of these will clearly point to customer boredom or dissatisfaction with your operation. *Tools: [Surveys](#), [scored and benchmarked comment cards](#), [daily interactions](#), [monitoring and analyzing spending habits](#).*
- Take time for analysis, exploration, and reflection. Most managers stay busy all the time. Many simply react to daily and weekly crises. Some only give infrequent and passing thought to the strategic direction of their operations as if everything runs well enough on auto-pilot. Without blocks of time set aside on a regular basis to consider their operations and the ongoing or dominant issues that impact their business; to analyze the ebb and flow of their business; to read, research, and reflect on operational ideas and best practices; and to work continually to improve all aspects of what they do, the enterprise will reflect in systemic ways their disinterest and neglect. Ongoing reflection, analysis, and engagement are essential. *Tools: [Benchmarking and review](#); [structured set-aside time](#); [professional reading lists](#); [ongoing review of trade journals and other publications](#); [adequate time off property for perspective](#); [relationships developed with other managers to discuss, compare, and brainstorm issues and solutions](#).*
- Make wow factors a significant part of your team’s effort. It stimulates the creative juices, breaks the tedium of habit, and can be fun for your staff while thrilling to your customers. *Tools: [Wow Factors](#) – read [What Have You Done for Me Lately?](#)*
- Make time for constant renewal – Arrange and organize your operation to handle the fundamentals routinely. The less effort you and your staff have to spend to execute the basics, the more time and focus you’ll have to conceive and execute the extraordinary. Follow the Pareto Principle to organize your operation so that 80% (the fundamentals) happens routinely, allowing you and your staff to focus on the critical 20% of customer service and satisfaction. *Tools: read [The Quest for Remarkable Service](#)*

Bottom Line: Get your operation “in the groove” with organization and structure. Then focus on ongoing renewal with continual process improvement and wow factors to avoid being “in the rut” of stale, uninspired programming, service, and service delivery.

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