

Casting: Your Secret Weapon to Building a Championship Team

A manager's greatest gift is to put people in roles they love and let them fly. Build your Hospitality A-Team by tuning into your team members' special talents and putting them in roles where they'll shine the brightest.

I'll never forget former manager Michelle, who berated me for stacking plates in front of two guests. She never offered to help and banished me to the worst stations. When I finally got a crack at a decent section, I built a \$3,000 check helping a businessman close a deal. Michelle was shocked when I bolted to another restaurant where the management took quick advantage. Remember, people don't



leave companies, they leave managers. Michelle missed the three tactics my mentor Michael used to build a multi-talented ensemble cast.

Know Your Actors

Like a great director, recognize and develop talent. First, observe with razor-sharp focus and analyze the galaxy of things that make your players unique: their habits, routines, mannerisms, and idiosyncrasies. Dial into everything from how well they read guest cues to how well they work with a prep cook.

Customize Your Feedback

Everyone has a preferred way of learning and taking direction.

Know that, for some, a simple whispered insight is enough. For others, demonstrating the "how" is critical: Don't ask guests if they want a drink. Try "Stanley, our bartender from Catonsville, makes a fabulous Tito's martini."

My mentor Michael knew I liked to be coached: straight up, on the spot, and often. One Friday night while standing near the pizza oven, Michael appeared as if from nowhere. "What's up with table 18?" he probed. "Well, the Wilsons are on their entrées," I replied. "Did you notice they need their wine topped off?" he fired back. Moments later I sold a second bottle. Later, he grabbed me in the side stand saying, "Nice job. Now sell them a bottle of Veuve Clicquot for the grand finale."

3. Cast for Star Performance

Michael understood that some team members loved to do certain jobs, and, yes, hated others. Balancing strengths and weaknesses is a practice that moved our team toward amazing success. We were a diverse group Michael transformed into celebrity status — a staff whose sum ability was greater than its parts. These were some of the starring roles:

- The side work, teamwork player. Michael knew that Brett loved order, collaboration, and staff efficiency. Michael made him the side work king. He had him orchestrate opening, ongoing, and closing side work. And, when training for teamwork, you shadowed Brett.
- The hospitality charmer. Julie worked the French door patio station. Michael knew his Ms. Congeniality would woo potential guests from the multitudes, who nightly filed past us on Wisconsin Avenue in DC. Like a carnival barker, she entertained with her New Jersey wisecrack warmth.

And, although Julie wasn't a natural born salesperson, Michael gave her helpful hints.

- Mr. Nimble. Matt turned tables like a whirling dervish. So, Michael had him work in our shoulder-to-shoulder jammed cocktail section. There he hawked beers, martinis, glasses of Chianti, and pizzas to share at warp speed. He was a perfect fit for the madness of the Georgetown bar mob. He hated working in the dining room, and rarely did.
- The super salesperson. Always enjoying being front and center, Michael put me in the primo dining room station where I flourished selling everything from bottles of Ruffino Ducale Gold label Chianti to our white chocolate banana mousse pie. Yet, he managed my aversion to side work and let me focus on what I did best.

Avoid a common manager mistake to expect every team member to perform brilliantly on every level, every night. Like Michael, build an ensemble cast with each actor working to their strengths, while at the same time playing off the strengths of each other. Never try to make a Julie a top salesperson or a sales superstar a side work enthusiast. Let each player excel in the worlds they love. Become a master caster. You'll create a championship team, banish superstar turnover, boost sales, and make your guests lifetime advocates.

BOB BROWN, president of Bob Brown Service Solutions (bobbrownss.com) pioneered Marriott's Service Excellence Program; worked with Disney, Hilton, Morton's of Chicago, Nordstrom, Olive Garden, and Ritz Carlton; internationally with Burj Al Arab in Dubai; has appeared on the Food Network; authored *The Little Brown Book of Restaurant Success*. Contact Bob at 571-246-2944 ©Bob Brown Service Solutions 2016.

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