



Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf finds fun is the key to retention

LOS ANGELES — At The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, a quick-service coffeehouse chain based here, the phrase “Go fish!” has nothing to do with playing cards, but still connotes having fun.

The Fish! program, named after the fish throwers at Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, is based on a management book by Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul and John Christensen and incorporates the company's four core concepts: having fun, being present, playing and choosing an attitude. The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, or CBTL, encourages its managers to create an entertaining work environment for employees and customers, including store-specific theme days and fun activities on Fridays, such as games like coffee craps.

“It helps [our employees] feel like individuals and have a great time at work,” said Susan Allen, district manager of the north region. “It creates great teamwork, makes them think beyond the box and makes them feel like it's not just a job.”

CBTL has nearly 400 stores worldwide, 190 of which are domestic. Hourly turnover currently hovers at about 94 percent, down from 200 percent in 1999, and management turnover is about 32 percent, according to Mike Serchia, the company's director of human resources.

“Turnover in this industry can kill you,” he said. “We need to get a handle on it. We've found that if we can keep our people, productivity will be better, efficiency will increase and we'll keep our turnover down.”

At CBTL, the focus on retention starts during the recruitment process, Serchia said. The company offers a “Day in the Life” program for prospective managers, encouraging them to spend up to four hours in a retail location to get a taste of the company's culture. CBTL also relies on interview questions based on a behavioral-based training program called FROTH, an acronym for friendly, respect, ownership, teamwork and



honesty. The company uses these characteristics and the feedback it gets from the FROTH-based questions to determine whether applicants are a good fit for the company, Serchia said.

New employees are immediately shuttled into CBTL's comprehensive training program. “We take a lot of interest in people's development,” Allen explained. “We place people, and then move them up based on their interests. We look to develop our people.”

All team members complete about 40 hours of in-store barista training, which includes retail training, product knowledge, customer service tactics and becoming familiar with the store environment. New workers also complete a Fish class, which introduces them to the philosophy and encourages team building.

Managers go through a longer six-week training program. According to Serchia, during the past couple of years, CBTL has stepped up its management training, which now includes

The 400-unit Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf chain encourages managers to create an entertaining workplace for its employees and customers, including theme days and games.

a shift supervisor-training program, a progressive management class and more one-on-one options. District managers currently are acting as coaches to help managers implement skills learned in situational leadership courses. And in 2003 the company debuted the Benny Buddy program, in which a member of senior management is auctioned off to provide guidance to a general manager.

“I think our training department has really identified what we need to do to provide a total quality experience to the customers and to keep getting them through the door,” Serchia said. Currently, the training department is working on developing a customer service module.

In its training programs and throughout the company, CBTL encourages employees at all levels to speak out about their likes and dislikes.

“This company empowers people to give feedback on how we feel out there in the field and what needs to change,” Allen said. “They ask for our opinion all the time and how can we do it.”

Twice a year, upper management conducts roundtables with general managers to talk about store and company issues and brainstorm solutions. According to Serchia, CBTL also uses its FROTH survey to measure employee attitudes about communication, leadership, benefits and products. The company then calculates these scores and develops new programs to improve in these areas.

CBTL also offers a number of financial incentives to encourage its staff to stay with the company, including Team Bean, an employee referral program that gives workers the chance to make \$150 to \$500 in extra cash.

— Brooke Barrier

Open communication helps keep turnover low at OSUMC

COLUMBUS, OHIO — Innovation and creativity are the name of the game at the nutrition services department at Ohio State University Medical Center, and it's the fun-filled attitude that keeps the institution's turnover at an astonishingly low rate of 12.7 percent, said Julie Jones, director of nutrition services.

With about 220 employees in nutrition services and four retail locations, the department serves approximately 2,000 patient meals a day and supplies the 875,000 customers who visit its cafes each year with a quality dining experience. The key to keeping employees in such a demanding job, Jones said, is “rewarding folks for what they do every day and having an employee-friendly environment where people can feel comfortable bringing their concerns to the manager.”

Over the past year, OSUMC nutrition services has reduced turnover, implemented a comprehensive training program and improved communication between hourly workers and management. The institution has involved department supervisors more fully in the hiring process, added a staff development and training officer, and started a lunch-buddy program that pairs new employees with management team members.

One of the most important factors in lowering turnover is the department's renewed focus on open communication, Jones explained. OSUMC nutrition services starts the conversation between employees and managers early — during the hiring process. “We needed to establish a more permanent staff, so we talked a lot more about what the job entails,” Jones said. “This job can be very difficult, physically demanding. So we really tried to communicate what the job requirements are.”



Julie Jones, left, director of nutrition services at Ohio State University Medical Center, says that managers, such as Jennie Smith, above, work to make sure employees feel comfortable communicating their concerns.



As part of a larger organizationwide program, OSUMC nutrition services also implemented “huddles,” or five- to 10-minute preshift meetings. The daily talking point of the huddle is determined by the medical center. According to Jones, management leads about seven huddles a day as employees come on for different shifts. It gives them an opportunity to interact with the staff in a forum where they can bring issues forward, so manage-

ment can take them into account, she said.

OSUMC nutrition services also recently opened an employee resource center to facilitate staff education about various lifestyle issues, such as smoking and high blood pressure. “We have a lot of staff from different countries, so we have a lot of cultural differences, and we really want to develop some lifestyle needs to help them,” said Wendy Walters, training coordinator.

OSUMC nutrition services also redoubled its focus on training. The department's aggressive program includes ongoing and annual training, area-specific training and education, mentoring, and leadership development, as well as more specialized training for managers. Hourly workers are trained on the job by their fellow staff members for four weeks. This encourages people to get to know their co-workers and helps develop a team mentality, Walters said.

At OSUMC, Walters said, managers complete ongoing training that gears them for the four key elements of their jobs: customer service, job knowledge, people development and teamwork. Managers are required to complete courses on food safety, leadership, and conflict and corrective action, which teach them how best to document and deal with problematic employees.

OSUMC nutrition services offers a comprehensive benefits package, which includes health insurance upon hire, as well as creative recognition programs, Jones said. Workers earn stars for demonstrating the characteristics of CREST, or caring, respect, excellence, service and teamwork. After they accumulate 10 stars, employees can “cash” them in for gift certificates to such locations as the gift shop or restaurants. The acknowledgment doesn't stop there. Managers often send “making a difference” cards to staff members who deserve praise for a job well done.

— Brooke Barrier