



RETHINKING THAT HOLIDAY HAM

By David Rothschild

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it's the holiday season again — the time of the year that many of us in food and beverage dread. A time that reminds us that we aren't like the 9-to-5 employees. We work holidays; we're not with our families celebrating. Many of us reassess our lives and question our career choices.

I worked every New Year's Eve of my adult life, until I started teaching. It was expected. I never even gave it much thought. Just another night at work. At midnight, the servers would run for a phone and call a loved one to wish them a happy New Year and give them a long-distance kiss. Then we'd be extra careful driving home since we were some of the only sober motorists on the road.

Management would do what it could to spread the holiday shifts around. If you worked

Thanksgiving, you got Christmas Eve off. If you worked Christmas Eve, you could stay home New Year's Eve. Each year, we'd come in at a specified time to pick up our company holiday gifts. In some restaurants that I worked in, we'd receive a ham for the holidays. In my case, kind of a peculiar gift considering that I'm Jewish and was, at the time, a vegetarian. But I accepted it in the spirit in which it was given. In other restaurants, we would eagerly open our paychecks in the hope that there was bonus money included. Bonuses were always predicated on how long you were with the company, not on any merit basis.

Maybe it's time we begin to rethink our incentive programs — holiday and otherwise. I know the economy is hurting; both businesses and individuals are tightening their belts. So maybe this is the perfect point to adopt the old adage about it being better to give than to receive.

As a high school teacher, I always encouraged my students to get involved in the community. Some schools even mandate a certain number of community service hours as a graduation requirement. Typically, when I made the suggestion, my students' initial reactions were, "I didn't do anything wrong. Why do I have to do community service?" But once they experienced how rewarding it was to help others, they soon saw the value.

Along these lines, many casinos we're associated with have programs where members of the casino workforce are encouraged to volunteer at shelters, food banks and soup kitchens. In many cases, it was not so many years ago that non-gaming First Nations were on the receiving end of charitable contributions. Remembering this, they deem it especially important to give back to the community now that they have the means to do so.

We should offer mentoring opportunities on our properties. Big Brothers Big Sisters has started a new program, The Native American Mentoring Initiative, to encourage and recruit greater numbers of Native American children and adults to participate in this enriching experience. "Committing to make at least 1,125 new Native American matches by the end of 2010," the BBBS Web site declares.*

So many food and beverage staff members consider their job a dead end. They don't see room for advancement or a future for themselves in the culinary department. As managers, there are ways we can adjust that outlook: Bring in guest speakers and trainers to open the eyes of the younger employees to all the possibilities. Help them to start thinking of food and beverage as a career, not just a job.

Some native casinos are starting apprenticeship programs where tribal staff members commit to two years of training in all areas of the hotel and casino opera-

— both front- and back-of-house — to participate in this type of project gives them a chance to learn more about indigenous ingredients. In some cases, it might even allow them to spend more time with their own children.

Offer incentives for the staff to use on property. Bonuses, based on merit, can take the form of dinner at one of the casino restaurants, concert or movie tickets, or passes to your bowling center. Plan a trip to another casino property or acclaimed area restaurant to allow members of your staff to see how another property delivers food and beverage service. Remind your people how much money is invested in each and every one of them — not just as wages, but also as training and benefits. And, while we're at it, let's remind ourselves of how valuable our employees are to the success of our operations. Happy holidays to one and all! **NAC**


tions and management. Applicants undergo rigorous interviews and screening before being accepted. Each is assigned a mentor from the property's management team. Completers are offered supervisory level positions with benefits and a salary. The apprentices we've met are dedicated to learning every facet of the business and are eager to commit to positions at the properties. We need to offer members of the food and beverage team the opportunity to continue their educations in their chosen field. Many community/junior colleges have accredited programs in culinary, hotel management and business management. Often, tribes will reimburse for college-accredited courses taken by members of the culinary team in good standing. Some (The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, for example) have even opened their own culinary arts training schools within their reservation's occupational training centers.

Encourage your staff (and offer comp time) to share their knowledge and expertise with local culinary programs. Both Intel and Motorola have programs in place where their top-level employees go out and mentor at local schools. Native American tribes have so much to offer the local culinary scene. Chefs can become resources, teaching the history and traditions of the tribes and sharing recipes and techniques.

At one Arizona property, elementary school children on the reservation help to grow and raise the crops that are utilized in the casino restaurants. Heirloom fruits, vegetables and legumes are resurrected and introduced to the dining public. Encouraging your F&B staff

* www.bbbs.org/site/c.djKKYPLJvH/b.4432493/

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