

Train teen employees to maximize profit

By Kathy Bergstrom

Today's teenagers are just as capable as you were when you reported to your first job, says a national expert on young employees.

But don't make the mistake of treating those young employees who work at your rink the same way you were treated, said Ken Whiting, a manager at Whiting's Foods of Santa Cruz, Calif. "Manage not through the eyes of when you were a teenager, but through the eyes of a teen today," he said.

Whiting's Foods is a family-run business and major food service provider on the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. Ken Whiting developed a program called WAVES for Teenage Workforce Success and speaks at events nationally about the topic.

In regard to young employees both in the snack/food area as well as the rest of your rink, Whiting said owners and managers have to adjust their techniques to reach and engage today's teen workers.

Here's a look at some of the advice Whiting offers:

* Getting the most out of young employees starts with hiring. Have a vision of your ideal employee, and keep in mind what their job duties will be.

* Consider social skills such as making eye contact, smiling and asking and answering questions. Good communication skills

and positive body language are especially important in the snack area where customer interaction is very high, and a smiling, helpful employee can set the tone for future food sales as well as for the image of your rink.

* Take into account the potential employee's availability and whether personal appearance meets standards – this is certainly a necessity in an area where food is involved and cleanliness is top priority.

* Today's young employees must be constantly reaffirmed or engaged. That means small things like welcoming them when they come to work each time and celebrating their successes.

* Recognize the employee's achievements at work and at school with small gestures like posting congratulations in newsletters or e-mails. When an employee does something right, make sure to call attention to it. "Look at work place mistakes as kinds of educational opportunities, but employers ought to go out of their way to catch them doing something right," he said

* Whiting advocates being as flexible as possible with scheduling to accommodate a young person's activities and offering incentives for good performance.

* Young people like their individual-

ism, so they will be happier if they have options on uniforms.

* Whiting views communication as an important element in keeping employees engaged.

or at home.

The most effective way to teach those skills is to back up the teaching with information about why they're important. "The older management practice of my way or the highway tends to just fall on deaf ears," he said.

For example, a manager teaching a new worker how to make change during a food sale can explain that being quick and accurate keeps customers happy and protects profits.

Rink owners also should share their goals for the business and seek input from their young employees. "Include them in the process. Share with them what the objective is and give them feedback," Whiting said. "They can become fiercely loyal when they are in fact kind of made to feel like they are part of the process and respected."

Be very specific about your objectives, including time frame for meeting them and dollar amounts. If you want the average sale at the snack bar to rise from \$4.90 to \$6, talk to the employees and get their ideas, he said.

"I would suggest that even though young folks are less prepared for the work place, they are as able as ever, maybe more so," Whiting said.



Interskate 91 roller skating centers in Hadley and Wilbraham, Mass., successfully employ young workers in their Perky's Food & Fuel area.

This age group is accustomed to digital media, so using e-mails or text messages for memos or announcements and online applications and schedules are effective.

Today's young people may not be as well prepared for work as those in the past, Whiting said. "You can't assume that they can simply go and sweep a floor or make change on a cash register." They're less likely to have learned those skills at school



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