



Mentoring our Future

By: Les Padzensky, KRHA Chair

As an industry, we play a major role in developing the U.S. workforce. In fact, nearly one in three Americans had their first job at a restaurant. We are the nation's largest employer of teens, making us the training grounds for America's workers. How we train and mentor these individuals will determine how we shape today's students into tomorrow's workforce.

Our industry teaches vital professional skills such as teamwork, multi-tasking, customer service and time management. These are skills that will stay with individuals throughout their careers, whether they stay in the industry or move into other professions.

As a mentor, you have the chance to provide support for students' skill and character development. Mentors are individuals that help guide and train, giving the opportunity to positively or negatively impact others. This is a great opportunity as well as a responsibility. Mentors can play many different roles.

- Educator – Instruct students in technical and soft skills.
- Supervisor – Give direction and show students how they fit into the needs of the operation.
- Coach – Provide feedback and encouragement to help students meet performance expectations.
- Counselor – Help students work through problems or attitudes that affect job performance.
- Role Model – Lead by example and help students develop effective skills and habits.

Most hourly employees in our industry are students that need a job with flexible hours that fit their busy lives. According to the National Restaurant Association, 28% of employees are students. Individuals stepping into the working world don't often have an understanding of the expectations of employment. It is critical for supervisors to teach them early in the onboarding process the importance of keeping commitments and showing up to work when scheduled. Teens don't always understand that when they get their first job, they have become a member of a team. Talk to staff about how every crew member is a part of a team and the importance of their role in that team's success. Make sure they understand your policy for requesting time off due to illness vs. request for other personal activities. Most operators want students to have the opportunity to participate in school activities and with the proper planning, can accommodate requested time off.

Mentors help students make the connection between their present performance and their future career. Teens don't often understand that what employers need most is for them to be great at their job, as that role is crucial to success for everyone. No matter what the position, every member of the team helps guide the organization to better revenue, more effective service, and opportunity for growth.

As a mentor, you play an important role in a student's life. By ensuring you are a positive mentor, you can help groom future industry leaders and create a high-quality labor pool. I encourage each of you to look for opportunities to have a positive impact on our industry workforce. The opportunities that we provide students will help them build a foundation for the rest of their career.