

# 50 Ways to Make Life Easier for You and Your Staff

by Wayne Toczek

**I**t's the first quarter of 2015—a good time to evaluate how you can improve your foodservice operation in the year ahead. Consider the following 50 tips that can streamline or improve your systems, and may ultimately enhance your resident satisfaction scores and bottom line.

1. Invest in dish racks if you don't have them or have the wrong kind. Replace broken racks. This is the single best way to protect your investment in china and allow items to air dry properly.
2. Limit garbage cans to the number actually needed and attach lids. Connect lids with cleanable nylon cords.
3. Check cleanliness of the dumpster area. Take or request action as needed. Make this part of your daily routine, not just when preparing for your state survey.
4. Interview periodically even if you're fully staffed. Having a back-up plan is a great safety net if employee issues arise.
5. Use your chemical vendor to in-service and orient staff. Establish core points to cover: cleaning and sanitizing methods, de-liming the dish machine, proper chemical dilution ratios, and more.



6. Download the state or local Food Code and use as your go-to food safety guide.
7. Jot down an agenda for each food show you attend. Target vendors based on specific food and menu items you want to learn about.
8. Monitor your preventive maintenance program. Prepare a preventive maintenance schedule if you don't have a maintenance department. Don't wait for equipment to fail—help avoid breakdowns with a proactive plan.

9. Request a monthly velocity report from your prime vendor. Meet monthly and look for purchasing opportunities.
10. Meet with your prime vendor rep quarterly to discuss opportunities for savings and new products.
11. Keep all recipes for the current menu cycle in both electronic and hard copy format. Look into production software that can easily expand recipe yields to various amounts.
12. Commit to a consistent calendar of special events. Plan holiday meals and specific theme days in advance. *Example:* Every third Thursday of the month is an ice cream social or is Taste of the World Day.
13. Update policies and procedures. Keep them current at all times and inform staff of any changes.
14. Change sanitizer solutions in buckets and sinks according to a schedule, such as every four hours. In heavy use times, replace more often.

**15.** Create an opening and closing checklist and use it every day. This allows your department to always be ready for inspection.



16. Find one item in your kitchen that has not been used in six months and remove it. Reduce clutter daily.
17. Offer beverages in bulk. Save money and time with this practice.
18. Offer a dessert cart every week or every month.
19. Stop worrying about the 14.5 hours between dinner and breakfast by offering continual breakfast beginning at 6:30 am. Investigate the possibilities and think outside the box.

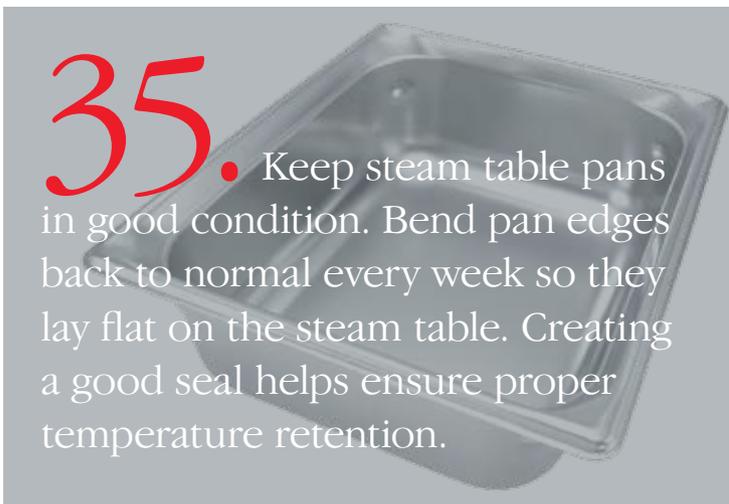
*Continued on page 26*

**20.** Get creative with supplements and offer a variety of foods. Other items have similar protein and calories, like health shakes.



- 21.** Purchase a wet vac for cleaning. Use it to clean out such items as non-drainable steam tables and other types of equipment.
- 22.** Communicate with email, especially work orders. This gives you an electronic “paper trail” should questions arise.
- 23.** Keep a maintenance log. Include every work order and follow-up request.
- 24.** Calculate a return on investment for each piece of equipment you need. Present those figures to your boss with the purchase order.
- 25.** Remove all drawers periodically. These are hiding places for dirt and clutter.
- 26.** Designate areas for sanitizer buckets and keep them there.
- 27.** Develop your in-service calendar and stick to it. Add extra programs as needed.
- 28.** Visit 10 percent of your customers every day and document it. This means a different 10 percent until all have been visited; then start over. This is the best way to determine customer satisfaction and create a communication line to your department. Commit to resolving issues promptly and documenting steps.
- 29.** Review the waste in your dish room, document and track it. Determine how it can be reduced.
- 30.** Orient all new employees completely. Follow up and repeat until new staff members are competent. Allow employees to do each job independently before training for another position.
- 31.** Write a department business plan. Address such questions as: How will your services look, feel, or perform differently? What is your timeframe for achieving results/change? What resources do you need to achieve your results – and what are the costs of those resources? How will you measure success? How does your plan support the company’s Mission Statement?
- 32.** Track everything that leaves the department and cost it out. Your food cost is the cost of your meal and all the extra things like cookies for special events. Track staff meals. This analysis allows informed decision-making on budgeting.
- 33.** Keep a log of all leftovers. Develop a game plan to use, and adjust production as needed for the next menu cycle. Add these items to your production sheet to communicate with staff.
- 34.** Establish a par stock shelf for china and stop panic buying when a dozen pieces break all at once. Develop and follow a formula that includes pattern and supplier for all tableware to avoid mismatched service ware and reduce breakage.

**35.** Keep steam table pans in good condition. Bend pan edges back to normal every week so they lay flat on the steam table. Creating a good seal helps ensure proper temperature retention.



- 36.** Update all signs posted in your kitchen to improve clarity and appearance.
- 37.** Track your invoices every week and assess how you are doing in relation to the budget. Share this information with staff.
- 38.** Understand what technology can do to make your job easier and make time to learn to use it.



**39.** Sell your value to your boss every month. Present a report of what you have done and achieved.

- 40.** Perform QA audits according to the schedule because it's the right thing to do. By completing these audits and taking action when indicated you will always be prepared for inspection.
- 41.** Reward your stable staff by having them ServSafe certified.
- 42.** Make sure everyone in your department can calibrate a thermometer.
- 43.** Mount your thermometer in the warmest spot in your cooler(s). Read internal temperature in freezer and cooler to ensure your foods are not in the danger zone.
- 44.** Update resident preferences six months after admission and every six months thereafter. Requests and preferences change over time.
- 45.** Cable tie any cord or hose up off the floor. This allows for proper cleaning and also avoids food collecting on cords lying on the ground.
- 46.** Learn about functional garnishing and teach your staff. Functional garnishing is a great, cost-effective way to present food. Offer food in a fashion that is functionally garnished in presentation and with condiments.
- 47.** Take the temperature of food at the beginning, middle, and end of service. The best way to test your temperature retention efforts is to read the thermometer in the middle and at the end. This allows you to determine whether your steam tables are staying hot, or if staff is turning steam tables off early to allow for easier cleaning.

- 48.** Develop a program to greet all new residents. Create a plan that allows you to introduce yourself, give them a business card, and tell them about meal times and menus, and establish that direct contact relationship.
- 49.** Make simple enhancements to the dining service for your rehabilitation customers. Enhance your room service trays. Consider keeping the condiments in a small, attractive caddy, instead of laying them on the tray. If feasible, use linen napkins instead of paper napkins to upgrade the appearance of your tray service.

**50.** Read four good business books per year. Read magazines such as *Edge* to learn from your peers and professionals in the industry.

There you have it! Fifty suggestions for a more efficient, effective operation in 2015. Pick and choose the ideas that best meet your unique needs, and brainstorm additional tactics with your staff to make your food service the best it can be! **E**



**Wayne Toczek** is CEO of Innovations Services, Norwalk, Ohio. Contact him at (419) 663-9300 or visit [www.innovaservices.info](http://www.innovaservices.info).

 [toczekw@earthlink.net](mailto:toczekw@earthlink.net)