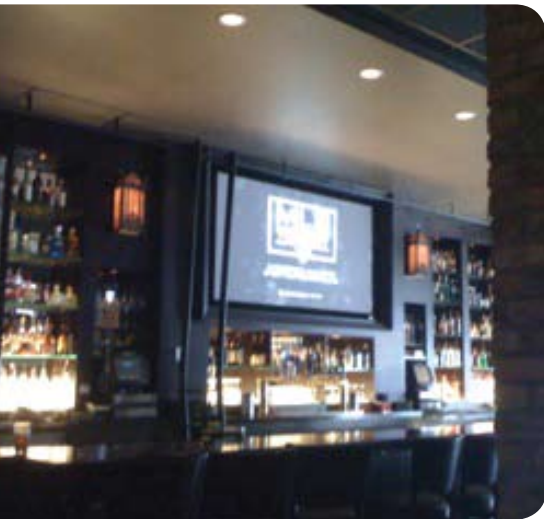


An Efficient Kitchen

IS A SUCCESSFUL KITCHEN

By Thomas D. Ligocki



An efficient setup helps Catch 22 in Milwaukee, Wisc. succeed.

If you're looking to reduce costs and improve service in your operation, the first place to start is in the kitchen. I think there's a lot to be said for an efficient kitchen. But be careful—"efficient" does not automatically mean "effective." It is all about improving upon the processes, via design, which will then create the efficiencies. So what can you do to reduce costs and improve service? Let's start by looking at a few formulas that need to be embedded in our memory banks. Just prior to writing this article, I was watching a very popular "news and financial TV station" identifying company X as needing to increase their prices because of increased costs. Is this the way it works? Let's look at the following.

Old Approach

$Cost + Profit = Price$

New Approach

$Price (fixed price) - Cost = Profits$

The old formula allowed for charging a price that took your cost into account, and then added what you wanted for profit. However, competition, the economy, and other factors may currently be creating a scenario where vendors and suppliers are as low as they can go. You've lowered your selling prices, reduced portion sizes here and there, and there is no place to focus other than reducing costs in your operations. Reducing costs and improving service should be your daily and hourly focus.

An efficient and effective kitchen can be achieved in any operation. Here are the areas I recommend you concentrate on. I call them "wastes."

Waste of:

- Space
- Over-production
- Waiting
- Motion
- Transporting
- Process
- Inventory
- Energy
- Time

Wastes cost you money and hinder service to your customers/guests. On the service end, the outcomes of an inefficient kitchen are:

- Delays
- Duplication
- Excess movement
- Unclear communication
- Opportunities lost
- Incorrect delivery of orders

Tips for improvement, blow by blow

Yes, I know. Those are a lot of areas to look at and improve upon. But they are right there in front of you. They are all happening every day. They are critical elements of your business. Neglecting to focus on any one of these areas will create inefficiencies. Here are some recommendations to get you started.

Space: Better utilization of space can mean more seating, less construction costs, less walking, faster service.

1. Think "cells" of operations not "lines" of operations
2. Consider under-counter refrigeration
3. Create under-counter can racks with working surfaces
4. Mixers on mobile stands
5. Stacking equipment by integrating custom designed fabrication

Over-Production: How full are your Slim Jims? Pizza buffets are notorious for over-production. Emptying your dumpsters less often can lead to savings in and of itself.

1. Know your portion sizes
2. Prep, based on history
3. Right size your equipment
4. Learn about blast chilling and rethermalization
5. Create menus that complement and supplement each other
6. Do you really need a 20 quart soup kettle?
7. Right size your packaging

Waiting: Aside from waiting for something to cook, bake, thaw, etc., your processes should be timed, and there should never be a wait beyond what the process calls for. Everyone should be doing "something productive" while they are waiting for an important process to take place. Whether an owner or employee, if someone is waiting, your process needs adjustment. Of course, customers should never be waiting beyond a reasonable time. Review the plan for the day, the menu, areas of operations, staff, and flow of operations. Being prepared should reduce waiting times.

Motion: Too much motion is tiring. Tired employees are not at their best, and excess motion is a waste of time. Excess and incorrect motions can cause injuries. Workman's comp claims are expensive. Pay attention to the motions of your employees. Take time to watch how your employees are moving as they are going through their daily routine. Find ways to decrease the amount of motion. Rested employees create better quality, better service, and more smiles! An employee's work station should be just that, a station. If there are several stations needed to perform a task, try to keep them as close to each other as possible.

Watch for these enemies of too much motion:

- Reaching too far
- Lifting too much
- Bending too often
- Twisting while lifting
- Manually doing something that a machine could do more efficiently (hours of slicing is a culprit)
- Flipping things
- Stirring things
- Excessive above-shoulder movements

Transporting: How many trips are made to the walk-ins? How far do you have to walk to obtain something you need for your current process? Do you have carts to transport items? Is your dish room location causing your dishwasher to spend most of his/her day walking to re-stock areas? How far are your waiters/waitresses walking to get to tables? Keep items that are needed for proper operation close to the operation. Excessive distance means extra time, which means wasted time, which means wasted money, which means additional costs. An efficient design can reduce excess transporting. Do not be afraid to place pedometers on your employees for a day or two and record a week's worth of data. It takes time to cover distances. The further the distance the more time, and the more cost in "wastes."

Process: This is one of the most important areas. Your processes, if efficient, help to reduce wastes in all areas of your operations. Take time to review your present process in every area of your operation. Once you have a process that works for what you want to accomplish, document it! You always want to look for ways to improve upon your present process. Some call it "streamlining" a process. Documenting processes also forms the basis of a good training program. I also suggest that you have a set of fresh eyes look at another's process and ask questions. Asking "why" is a good way to gather information about a process. Why do you have your knives placed there? Why is the prep table positioned there? What are the steps that take place in the process? Can some steps be eliminated? Are there too few steps? Take videos of a process and ask your employee to watch and

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observe the process he or she is using. A good and proper process can make a poor performer better, and a good performer great.

Inventory: You can never enough "stuff" on the shelves 'cause you have got to be ready for that rush of customers, right? Wrong. Excess inventory is a waste of money. Walk-ins too large. Too many shelves. FIFO (first in, first out) not taking place. Spoilage. Searching for items because there is too much to maneuver through to get to what you want. Usually owners only assess their inventory if something cannot be found or wasn't ordered. But you need to keep a close eye on your inventory, and it needs to be "visual". In other words, you need to be able to see everything and know if you have too much or too little, at a glance. If necessary, label or color code shelves and items. Bar codes can be helpful too, and can be a fast and effective way to control inventory. If you have ever met a salesperson who travels a lot, talk to them about inventory. They usually have exactly everything they need, nicely packed, in an efficient manner. Those who pack for a vacation once a year usually bring more than they need. Think about it.

Energy: Let's start with your equipment. Is it Energy Star rated? Is it in proper working order? Make sure you clean your equipment properly and conduct proper maintenance, per the schedule outlined by the manufacturer. Is air flow as it should be in your kitchen? Is the hood functioning properly? When was it last cleaned? How often are you opening and closing your walk-ins? Is gas more efficient than electric? Have you checked out Induction ranges? Is your lighting sufficient? Are you using programmable equipment? There are many great sources that can keep you abreast of energy enhancing methods and equipment. Magazines, e-magazines, and the internet in general, have information that can put you in great position to trim your energy costs. Many local energy providers that you are paying for the service that allows you to operate your business, sometimes provide "free" check-up service. Do not hesitate to call your service provider to inquire about free services. Sometimes equipment providers and manufacturers reps have access to reports that evaluate foodservice equipment and rate the equipment with regard to energy savings. Do not hesitate to ask for the reports. I also like to use the acronym HAWG'EM to remind operators of the energy wastes: Heating, A/C, Water, Gas, Electric, and Maintenance. Pay attention to all of these areas which may help you keep control of your energy "haws"!

Time: Well, we never have enough of this item, do we? Know how long it takes to perform every process in your operation. Do not hesitate to carry a stopwatch and a notepad—not to make processes go faster, or employees move faster, but to attach a time to a process. Improve the process and save time. Wouldn't it be great to improve upon the cleaning processes in your operations, whereby saving time? Getting employees out of the kitchen and on their way home to rest by saving time on cleaning is a good thing! This doesn't mean we are going to clean less, or more. It means we are going to take the appropriate amount of time to clean. The correct process in place will get the job correctly done in the proper amount of time. More time means more time to concentrate on improving quality, means more time to create a better service plan for your customers. Start with these areas to look at and observe.

- Prep time
- Cleanup time
- Time between "clocking in" and starting to work.
- How time is used prior to "clocking out"
- Cooking times
- Thawing time
- Restocking time
- Time it takes to communicate orders
- Time to do administrative tasks
- Time it takes to count inventory, assess inventory

Once you get all of your "wastes" under control the improvement in service will follow. An efficient and effective kitchen will reduce delays and duplication, and free up time to improve communication. Don't forget, there are no areas in the kitchen that are off limits when looking for wastes. Efficiencies are not only found in equipment, but in people and processes too.

Thomas D. Ligocki is a Commercial Kitchen Consultant/Designer and Owner of Lean Kitchen Solutions, LLC in Sheboygan, Wis. He has brought Lean Design Methodology to the commercial kitchen industry with great success. His consultation and design approach creates operational savings, greater efficiency, and "effective" kitchens. Learn more at www.leankitchensolutions.com or reach Tom at tligocki@leankitchensolutions.com.