

GREENING RESTAURANTS



Technology Upgrades Create Opportunities for Employee Behavioral Changes

Restaurants that effectively reduce their energy, water and waste consumption in an effort to adopt a “green” strategy can see up to a 15%-25% decrease in operating expenses and a healthier workplace. Recently, technologies have appeared in the markets that claim to decrease energy and resource use thereby delivering this substantial return almost automatically. Many of these technologies such as programmable thermostats seem to remove the need for human action altogether. However, as good as it sounds, someone has to learn to program and maintain each piece of new technology.

Consequently, the actual return from technology upgrades relies on the assumption that once in

“Technological upgrades claiming to reduce resource usage are only as good as the behavioral change that can be enacted to maximize the return.”

place, people will, with little prompting, change their behavior.

It is overly simplistic to assume that presenting staff

and management with information and logical arguments on why they should embrace technological upgrades that claim to reduce resource consumption - even those based in economic terms - will successfully result in a change of behavior. Framing the message so that it resonates with each individual staff member and customer in an organization in order to influence behavioral change is no easy task.

Over the last few decades, some significant advances in cognitive and behavioral sciences have given us a greater understanding of the human mind. We understand the way we make decisions and how and why we deviate from the way we think we make decisions and behave. We know more than ever what prevents us from taking action and what motivates us to change our behavior.

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Before talking further about the promise of these new behavioral insights to greening restaurants, it’s important to note the difference between behaviors and attitudes since these terms are often used interchangeably. In a nutshell, behaviors are what we want to influence to actually get results - the actions people perform. Attitudes are one of many possible influences on behavior. Other behavioral influences include perceptions, beliefs, information, lifestyles, and habits.

There is little correlation between behavior and attitudes, and it’s worth bearing in mind that



strategies that influence attitudes may have no effect on behavior and vice versa. For example, a sous chef concerned about the natural environment might not take the necessary steps in the kitchen environment to reduce energy consumption or care to learn how to use less water during food prep.

One of the first ways that our increased understanding of human behavior can help is by improving the use of information to encourage green behaviors. We now know that just providing information is not enough. When using an information campaign, it is important to make it

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specific, vivid, and personal, and to include follow-through steps. Does the information and the visuals address

the issues important to those you want to influence? Do you know the issues that will motivate individuals within the organization? We have learned that they are not the same for all individuals and groups. Don’t assume they are.

There is an important relationship between technology, in its many forms (including equipment, management systems, and tools) and behavior. While technology can somewhat displace the need for green behaviors, such as energy efficient appliances, programmable thermostats, and automatic sensors, behavior can greatly enhance the use of the technology. It is far too common that new equipment is not used to its potential by its intended users. Behavior-focused education, training, and engagement strategies can ease the adoption and

optimize the use of new technology. Well-designed policies and protocols based on understanding of the intended users greatly enhance the ability to achieve desired results.

Behavioral and cognitive insights also emphasize the importance of the framework in which employee decisions are made. The physical layout and design of the restaurant can promote smart decisions by making good choices easier and providing cues and rewards that promote good habits. For example a light switch in the wrong place may mean it is forgotten at the close of the business day. The culture of the restaurant - the relationships among employees and guidance from management - is also extremely important for good behavior development. We are social animals and heavily influenced by the attitudes and actions of those around us.

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Naïve beliefs and expectations

about human behavior and an emphasis on technological solutions alone will get us nowhere fast. A focus on people, a restaurant’s most valuable asset, and the use of intelligently combined, behavior-based strategies are essential. They are the most cost-effective way to cut costs and make the resource conversation changes we need.

“Cutting-edge” does not just describe new technologies; it can - and should - also be a new way of thinking.



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