The Great Game of Business®

Case Study
Zingerman's Roadhouse
Location: Ann Arbor, Michigan
2015 Revenues: $9.3 million
Employees: 160
Industry: Restaurant

Highlights

Challenge
Find a way to get staff to commit to delivering better food faster to create exceptional customer experiences.

Solution
Leverage the company's open-book roots to track ticket times as a way to get everyone working together.

Results
By getting the staff to track the right numbers, and incentive to beat them, the restaurant cut the number of late orders and complaints by nearly 80%.

Zingerman's Roadhouse, a full service, 200-seat restaurant offering fabulous food from all around America, is also a member of the Zingerman's Community of Businesses.

Company Background
Zingerman's Deli has been pushing the edge for great-tasting food, fun and educational eating experiences since it opened its doors in 1982. But in 2003, the founders of Zingerman's, Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw, teamed up with a talented and classically-trained chef by the name of Alex Young to open up Zingerman's Roadhouse – which became part of the growing Zingerman's Community of Businesses.

> *"When you get a staff person that is highly engaged in their job, they can make a tremendous difference in the day to day operations of a business."*

Playing the Game Together

Anyone who has ever worked in a restaurant, whether it was a summer server gig or as a head chef, will tell you that ticket times are a key performance indicator. That's especially true for a business like Zingerman's that believes in the triple bottom line results of food, service, and finance.

"Tracking ticket times is good for the food because it's served at the right time," says Young. "It's good for customer service because, well, it's good customer service to not let your guests wait for too long. And it's good for finance because you can turn tables faster."

But the factors that impact how long those ticket times last are complex and involve a long chain of people, starting with the host and extending back into the kitchen with the chef and expeditor.

Complaints about ticket times became a hot topic during the restaurant's GGOB huddle in 2012 after a new chef arrived on the scene. "The change of guard was challenging for the team and the number of ticket times complaints weren't helping the overall energy of the team," says Young, noting that several delays were as long as 20 minutes. "The conversations around the issue in the huddle were quite heated. Everyone was trying to hold everyone else responsible for the ticket times and the team was becoming divided over the issue."

What the team soon realized was that ticket times weren't on their scoreboard – and so weren't being tracked, even though the restaurant generated as many as 20,000 tickets a week. So the team began collecting data on each and every ticket, which allowed them together as a team to zero in on areas that were creating the problems. The result was that late tickets dropped from about 300 a week to less than 80 – with most of those representing just a few minutes of delays.

"Having a data driven, repeatedly measured metric to manage brought everyone to the table with solutions rather than blame," says Young. "Frontline staff from both sides of the 'kitchen counter' were suddenly asking questions like how can we as the entire restaurant work together to make this better? Before we knew it, everyone was holding themselves accountable for late tickets – it was no longer just the kitchen's problem to solve but all of ours."

The result was a dramatic drop in late ticket complaints – but also a solution to a problem that would crop up anytime there was a change in the kitchen. "Now every shift the expeditor sends out a report with, among other things, details on every late ticket," says Weinzweig, "and there's way more communication on every shift every day between everyone to help manage more effectively."

The team is now also able to use forecasting to help better predict what will happen in times of change while also playing MiniGames with delicious handmade rewards by the chefs for cutting down on late tickets.

"The fact that we're tracking the late tickets each week has permanently changed the attitude around a complex and significant issue that we know will pop up over and over again," says Young.

"Small, quick wins that were all leading to one big win!"

Rapid Financial Results; Lasting Cultural Change

By engaging their staff in solving problems like late ticket times, while giving them a stake in the outcome through a gain-sharing program, Zingerman's Roadhouse enjoys a turnover rate of just 68% compared to the industry average of 250%. "We have people who have worked here for nearly 10 years," says Young, which is an uncommonly long stint in the industry.

Of course, a few of the people who have left the staff at the Roadhouse have used the open-book skills they learned on the job to move on to opening their own businesses – including several within the Zingerman's Community of Businesses.

"One of the biggest joys in my life is when I have a cook who moves on to be successful in running their own kitchen," says Young. "And if they can do that without our organization, the joy is even bigger."

"Everyone is on the same page and working towards a common goal.
No us vs. them. No blame. No shame. A team that comes together every week to come up with a data
driven and solution focused approach to a challenge that is key to our restaurant's success."