

# Switch Restaurant has **staff development** on the menu

SMALL BUSINESS VICTORIA



Switch Lifestyle Restaurants represents contemporary dining and is known for its comprehensive menu, extensive cocktail list and boutique wines all complemented by stylish surrounds. Switch Lifestyle prides itself on versatility, making it ideal for all occasions.

Opening the first restaurant in Knox in 2004, Switch Lifestyle quickly fostered a reputation of having a welcoming organisational culture – with a strong emphasis on excellent food, friendly service and healthy lifestyle.

Nowadays there are three Switch Lifestyle restaurants, with additional venues established in Fountain Gate and Watergardens shopping centres.

With three large restaurants to run, and over 90 employees to manage, Debbie Fox - Finance and Administration Manager needed to ensure that her staff had the capabilities to deliver her business model consistently across those venues.

'The management team had identified some major skills gaps – particularly in the areas around communication and customer service,' she said.

'The lack of workplace communication, especially between front-of-house staff, was having a negative impact on efficiency and productivity and we wanted to address this immediately.'

Debbie signed up for the Skills for Growth Program through discussions with AVTES – one of the Service Providers contracted to deliver the Program. An AVTES Specialist was appointed to work directly with the business and went about assessing the organisation and the areas of operations that needed improvement.

Through establishing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, the specialist found that due to lack of time and resources, particularly in the administration department, staff workloads were excessively high and many development opportunities were missed.

'In short, we were just too busy running the day to day operations. Forward thinking and future planning was a luxury we just couldn't afford.' Debbie said.

'Having a specialist reviewing your business at no cost is invaluable. They take the time to see the potential of staff and look for ways you can maximise their contribution to the organisation.'

A Workforce Action Plan was developed, which proved to be a valuable resource for the three restaurants. It helped to distinguish the employees who were committed to growing with the organisation and those who weren't. An induction

manual was also created which was rolled out across all three venues, meaning more consistent information and processes.

'Having clear documentation of strategic actions has helped motivation levels among staff, most surprisingly the managers are feeling more positive and energised,' said Debbie.

'The training arrangements have been flexible to accommodate employees' other commitments. Initially some staff were reluctant to get involved, but the teambuilding exercises helped them to work together and assist one another by discussing their progress, ideas and tasks which arose. This encouraged them to give feedback to the managers, as they become more confident offering their ideas to the business.'

A total of 55 employees took up the training recommendations offered – almost 50% of the organisation. The training courses consisted of Certificate IV in Hospitality, Certificate IV Business Administration and various traineeships that provided clearer career paths for staff and has improved staff retention.

'Our staff now have the qualifications that accurately reflect their standards and knowledge,' said Debbie. 'Many of our staff were easily at a high education level in their skills and processes, they just didn't have the paperwork to support this.'

'The restaurants who undertook training recently recorded high scores in a mystery shopper rating, averaging 95%. This sends a clear message to our management team about the value of investing in our staff.'

'It is apparent that the trained staff are also more comfortable providing their ideas and suggestions, and having input into the decision-making process. Staff are generally more involved and are a greater asset to the business.'

'Our organisation will definitely continue our involvement with further training of current and new staff. The Skills for Growth Program has provided an excellent foundation for us to keep building our skilled and motivated workforce.'

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