

SUSTAINABILITY:

Saving the World and Making More Money One Vendor At A Time

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OVERVIEW

In the last article, you learned that you can decrease costs (and thus increase your establishment's profits), foster goodwill with your guests and customers, market your environmental issues, and save the environment by:

- Not providing things such as water on tables or straws without asking the customers first or being asked by them.
- Avoiding overuse of packing and bags.
- Not giving out utensils, sauces, salt and pepper, etc. on To Go orders without asking the customers or being asked for them.
- Using social media, your website, signs, table tents and other marketing tools to promote how you are helping the environment.

Remember, a penny saved is a penny earned and a small part of the environment saved as well.

The previous article focused on smaller items that can really add up. This article will focus on larger savings that can really add up. This article will focus on the positive and upbeat. Well, there is one piece of bad news. Your parents were right.

Your parents taught you lessons that you gave up when you started cooking professionally. Close the door to keep the cool air in and the heat out! Turn off the oven when you aren't using it! Turn off lights when you leave the room! Turn off the faucet, don't let it drip! You were taught that money "didn't grow on trees" and that you had to save money by watching what you did in the house.

Then you started working in professional kitchens. You walked in and turned on ALL the ovens and burners and lights just because that's what was done in a kitchen. You didn't bother to fully shut the walk-in

door behind you because someone (like yourself) was just going to go back into it in a minute. You defrost a prime rib under blasting water because no one thought to put it in the walk-in a couple of days ago. You run the dishwasher with the rack less than $\frac{1}{3}$ full because you were taught to keep the machine always running. You throw product in the trash without giving it a thought. Or you throw all your trimmings into the stock pot which you run on a burner all day, and then one week later throw out the stock. You have large pots of water boiling all day for no reason that you can think of.

You and your operations' owners and fellow kitchen people are wasting a ton of gas, electricity, water, and increasing what goes in the dumpster for no reason other than "we've always done it this way!" As we know, this increases expenses, decreases profits, and is bad for the environment. The problem is that you are not clearly seeing what you are wasting, and how you can make small (and large changes) to fix these issues.

Now, time for the good news. (Remember, we promised this would be positive.) People are willing to help you do an audit of your environmental practices. Most of these people will do it for free, or for a small charge. And when you make your changes, you can market to your guests, and potential guests, that you are working diligently to be more environmentally friendly.

So, who are these people?

LOCAL GAS COMPANY

Your local gas company has teams of people that will come out and make recommendations on how you can save gas. Ask them to check for

leaks as well. Because of your hood running, you might not notice a small leak that is only in effect when the equipment is running.

One of the first things they will tell you is to only have a burner running when a pan is on it. Burners don't need to heat up. If there is not a pan on it, then turn it off. (For those who remember Chef Emeril on Food TV, he would frequently say, "The manufacturer of the stove put knobs on it, you can use them.") However, a suggestion to really get the point across, is to ask them how much it costs to have 4 burners, or 6 or 8 (depending on the size of your ranges) running at full throttle for one hour, then multiply that by the numbers of hours they are on in a day/week/month/year.

Warning: your instinct will be to not follow most of their suggestions because "we've never done it that way before." Give their suggestions a try for a few months and see what happens to the bills. You and your staff will get used to all the suggestions in quick order just like you and your staff get used to daily specials.

LOCAL ELECTRIC COMPANY

Your local electric company has teams of people that will come out and make recommendations on how you can save electricity. Something as simple as changing light bulbs, putting new weather stripping on the doors of the walk-in, adjusting the closure of the outside doors, changing the air conditioner one or two degrees, or putting strip curtains on your freezer door can save you a ton of money. Likewise, cleaning your hood filters, the condenser coils on cooling units, etc. can save money and prevent breakdowns. Once again, your instinct will be to turn down most of their suggestions because "we've never done it that way before." Give their suggestions a try for a few months and see what happens to the bills. You and your staff will get used to all the suggestions in quick order just like you and your staff get used to daily specials.



LOCAL GARBAGE AND RECYCLING COMPANY

Your local garbage and recycling company or companies. Sometimes these are the same company, sometimes they are different. Let them show you ways to minimize what goes into landfill and how to maximize recycling. Owners, chefs, and cooks are really good at keeping up with food trends but they aren't so strong on keeping up with changes in recycling trends. Just

because something wasn't recyclable a few years ago doesn't mean it isn't recyclable now. And for the third time, warning: your instinct will be to turn down most of their suggestions because "we've never done it that way before." Give their suggestions a try for a few months and see what happens to the bills. You and your staff will get used to all the suggestions in quick order just like you and your staff get used to daily specials.

COMPOSTING SERVICE

See if there is an independent compost service or one through the garbage company. A true story: nearly twenty years ago, one of the authors of this article was approached with an experimental program for a major California county to try a composting program to see if it was viable for restaurants. The idea was that the full-size garbage dumpster with twice a week pick up would be replaced by two small ones: one for garbage and one for compost. Within two months, it got to the point of a small dumpster for composting and two 32 gallon cans for garbage twice a week. The cost savings (of 20 years ago) was several hundred dollars per month. The actual composting of the material was done off-site by the garbage company. The only thing done onsite was putting the compostable material – which is a lot more than you would think – into the compost dumpster. Reminder that your instinct will be to turn down most of their suggestions because "we've never done it that way before." Give their suggestions a try for a few months and start saving money.

PRIME SUPPLIER

Check with your prime supplier. Your sales rep is knowledgeable about you, your operations, and the products they carry. In addition, many of these suppliers have advisers and consultants in-house (or outside firms that they retain) who will give you advice, guidance, and environmental and cost reviews for free, or for a nominal cost. Start with such basic things as whether you are buying the right size, or whether you should be buying larger sizes and refilling containers. But don't limit them to just a few purchasing issues. Give them free range to guide you beyond that. Let them make suggestions. And, you know the drill, give the suggestions a try for a few months.

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIER

Check with local equipment suppliers. If you have one, great. If you don't, ask your friends at

ACF meetings to recommend one or check with your prime supplier. Have these people come out and take a look. Things as simple as cleaning the burners on stoves and ovens can add up to gas savings. (And remember, natural gas is not a renewable resource. Saving gas saves you money and saves the environment.) Getting a new flat top might be less expensive than you think, and the energy costs might have the new unit pay for itself in a short time: you won't know until you let them look at your place. Local representatives will also know about rebates and incentives from manufacturers. Just as important, they will also know about tax credits and other government incentives at local, county, state and federal levels that could help offset the cost of the new equipment. Bet you never knew that helping the environment could get you sparkling new high tech equipment! Finally, your local representative will know about ways to get rid of the old equipment with less of an environmental impact, ranging from scrap dealers hauling it away to giving it to nonprofits such as homeless shelters.

LOCAL WATER COMPANY

Your local water company, particularly in areas subject to occasional or recurring droughts, will also have people to come out and look at your operations and make suggestions. Some you already know, such as fixing the dripping hand sink, some you will tacitly avoid like the example of defrosting food under blasting water, and some you might never have heard of. (And if we tell you, then you will have heard of it!)

ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

Your local city or county environmental agency. Many jurisdictions have agencies whose purpose is to help you have less of an environmental impact. Look them up online and find out if they have people who will come out and work with your business to decrease your impact. Many have online mini-courses or other tools that can help you save money and the environment right away. These agencies are often particularly helpful with recycling and compost programs plus local rebates and incentives. This is the last time we will warn you that your instinct will be to turn down most



Remember in the first article with the issue of government authorities starting to require more environmental responsibility? Electrification—requiring the use of electric power for new construction, major remodels, etc. is already being required in many locales around the country. There have been several discussions in ACF's National Culinary Review and at ACF conferences about advances in electrical equipment, but some are still stubbornly reluctant to try them.



However, as a chef, cook or owner you need to keep in the front of your mind that ALL cruise ships use only electric equipment; and building restrictions and regulations in many parts of the country require kitchens in high rises to be all electric. If the cruise ship chefs and cooks can do it, then you can explore the idea. If the corporate dining chefs and cooks, as well as the restaurant chefs in those high rises can do it, then what is stopping you?

of their suggestions because “we’ve never done it that way before.” Give their suggestions a try for a few months and see what happens to the bills.

EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Are there food service or hospitality programs at the local community college or college in your area? Contact the department chair and ask if they have a program where students—supervised by a professor—can come out and do energy reviews and recommendations. Most programs will do this for free, or for a small donation.

ACF COMMUNITY

Check with your fellow ACF members:

At the next meeting ask them what they have done to become more environmentally friendly. Ask them who they contacted. Ask them how it worked and how much money they saved. Ask them what their guests thought.

Reach out to the chapter president and ask them to put on educational seminars on issues such as sustainability, becoming more environmentally conscious, how to save gas/electricity/water, etc.

Better yet, after you have become versed on these subjects, volunteer to put on training for the other members.

IT NEVER HURTS TO ASK

Just asking can save the environment and save you money. A few years ago, one of the authors of this article took over teaching the culinary program at a vocational school. The dishwasher kept breaking down, and the facilities manager for the school kept calling in and paying for a repair person. When the author asked why the company that supplied the chemicals didn’t come and fix the machine for free, they were told that the chemicals were purchased from a janitorial supplier who didn’t service dishwashers.

The author contacted the prime vendor, found out that the chemicals bought through them were cheaper than the janitorial supplier. Additionally, since they would be supplying the chemicals, the machine maintenance would be free.

It gets better. The first time the machine broke down, the repair person from the prime vendor said that they had an incentive program on a new water/energy/chemical efficient machine with a \$99.00 monthly lease. The machine was guaranteed to save more than \$100.00 a month in chemicals, electricity and hot water. If it didn’t, then the machine would be free for the rest of the lease. In

the first month, the machine saved hundreds of dollars in chemicals, electricity, water, and the gas needed to heat the water. It also put substantially less water and chemicals down the drain which earned a rebate from the local waste water disposal company!

The bottom line: ask for assistance and advice. It can save your business a lot of money and help save the environment.

CONCLUSION

Above are ten suggestions. Let’s just say that each one saves your business at least \$100 a month, which is quite likely. That’s \$1,000 or more saved a month. That’s \$12,000 or more a year. Now, take a look at your menu and pick out three or four of your most profitable items. How many of each would you have to sell in a year to make over \$12,000 after costs? Get the picture? Repeat the same exercise but assume that you save \$2,000 a month for \$24,000 a year.

Now, remember about green marketing. You saved costs and started to help save the environment. But remember to market the new greener business on social media, your website, in your establishment. What you are doing is not only going to help your world, but it will also make your customers happier as well. And happy customers mean more customers. And, of course, hospitality is about making customers happy.



American Culinary Federation
Education Foundation