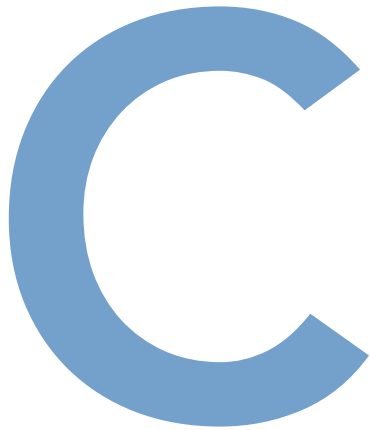


# *Stretching* Your Workforce



to Go  
the Extra  
Mile

By Bob Dawkins and John Grech



ross-training/cross-utilization are generally recognized as a strategy for enhancing profitability inside the hospitality industry. It involves training employees in a multitude of tasks so that they can perform several jobs, and it provides many benefits for the organization, as well as the employee.

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## **Benefits**

Some of the biggest benefits to the company, if not the biggest, are reduced labor costs and increased productivity, which can be particularly vital in a small or geographically-isolated market where the labor-pool is small or restricted. For example, cross-utilization of a Server to Bartender enables the server to assist the bartender in busy periods or cover both positions during slower periods. When many people have been cross-trained and understand how to handle a key job or process, operations can continue when essential associates aren't available.

Beyond covering for employees during busy periods or when they aren't available, hospitality companies that cross-train are also better equipped to absorb and, in some instances, recover quicker from disturbances in the market, such as an economic downturn, the off-season, or a holiday season. When disruptions do occur, a cross-trained organization will be better

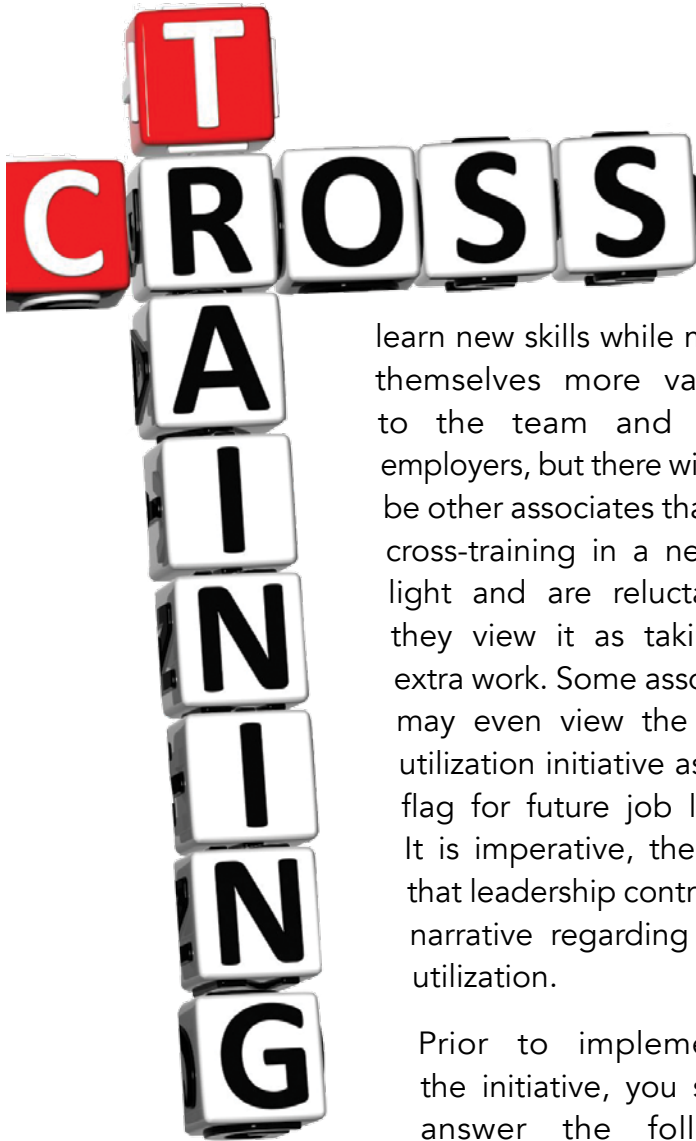
positioned to ensure service continues with minimized disruption.

Finally, cross-training allows associates the opportunity to build relationships with other departments and people with whom they would otherwise have little contact. These relationships break down work silos and foster teamwork. When associates have a better understanding of each other's roles and tasks, it increases employees' understanding of the big picture.

If your organization decides to leverage cross-utilization, be sure to properly prepare, implement, and preserve the initiative in order to reap the full benefits.

## **Preparing Your Team**

One of the biggest concerns for an organization starting to cross-train is the mindset of the associates. Are they ready and willing to cross-train? A motivated associate will be eager to



learn new skills while making themselves more valuable to the team and future employers, but there will likely be other associates that view cross-training in a negative light and are reluctant as they view it as taking on extra work. Some associates may even view the cross-utilization initiative as a red flag for future job layoffs. It is imperative, therefore, that leadership controls the narrative regarding cross-utilization.

Prior to implementing the initiative, you should answer the following questions for everyone involved with the process:

- What is the objective of cross-training?
- When and how long is the training process?
- What will the training involve?
- How does this benefit associates?

Controlling the narrative will reduce rumors and gossip and will assist in ingraining cross-utilization into the property's culture. The more information that can be shared,

the easier it will be to gain acceptance from the group.

Associates that view cross-training as a benefit should be leveraged to bring into the fold associates who are not as enthused about the cross-training endeavor. Team members that are already on board will also assist with stopping rumors before they start.

### **Implementation Process**

In order to ensure successful implementation of a cross-utilization program, it is essential to understand the assigned tasks and current workload of associates. By documenting and reviewing the job processes, you will be forced to understand why things are done the way they are and consider if they could/should be done differently.

The process to accomplish this requires the development of Task Lists by job for those that could potentially be cross-trained.

For each job, list:

- Every task in chronological order by time of day, along with a brief description of the work involved and skills required.
- A reasonable expectation (RE) of time required to complete each task.
- The frequency of each task. In other words, how many times during the day is the task completed/performed? Is the task completed the same number of times every day, or should the task be completed more or less depending on the number of customers?

While creating the task lists, it is important to collaborate with your team. Associates

should feel they are a part of the decision-making process and, in many cases, they will know more about their job tasks than management does. At this point, it's advisable to refine the workflows and processes to ensure tasks are being done in the most effective manner.

Once the draft Task Lists are complete, you should begin the process of identifying duplication and redundancy amongst the jobs. Eliminating duplication of tasks will ensure increases in productivity and improve labor management.

Next, identify jobs that require similar skills as the targets for cross-training. Instead of cross-training

positions would be a natural fit. Once you have identified the essential tasks and the best-suited jobs for cross-utilization, you are ready to begin the actual cross-training.

There are several approaches to the training process, such as demonstrating, instructing with verbal or written directions, and/or supervising performance, but the most common method is the buddy system (shadow training). Whichever approach is taken, it is necessary that everyone be on the same page and communicate the same message.

As you progress through the training process, know that there will be challenges. For example,



a single person to handle another person's tasks, you should come in with the mindset of cross-training several people from several teams. Simply training a single person potentially leaves you one step away from your existing situation. For example, Reservations, Front Desk, and Concierge all require guest contact skills, so these three

managers and supervisors often forget what it's like to acquire a new skill set and they may lose patience with the process because of this. In measuring labor hours vs. the output, you will notice an initial loss in productivity, but keep the faith as your short-term loss in productivity will result in long-term efficiency gains. As a rule, a 30-60-90 day approach should

be used for evaluating performance. Although some early setbacks are common, you will see incremental improvements that have a cumulative effect if you stick with the cross-training initiative.

### **Preserving the Benefits**

Once you are further down the road in your cross-utilization journey, it is critical to put mechanisms in place to ensure a cultural change. Without a cultural change, it's easy for employees to slip back to less productive practices.

Document your new roles, practices, and job combinations. Documentation should include the physical job combinations and shared roles, as well as the scenarios and trigger mechanisms that would require cross-utilization. Test your new processes and assumptions. If you have the ability to test your new work model against historical volumes and/or production, you should do so. If labor cost reduction is your ultimate goal, a best practice is to review your test results and compare them against past performance, hours, and productivity. From a pure execution standpoint, you can randomly move associates around to their newly trained areas to

ensure they are prepared to perform and execute at a moment's notice.

Finally, be sure to get employee feedback. If cross-utilization has added to employees' workloads to the point they can no longer execute their role(s) effectively, it's essential to know this as soon as possible. Furthermore, employees that are empowered to give productive feedback will often find additional process enhancements. Cross-utilization is a living process and should always be challenged, modified, and improved as team members become more comfortable in their role and their knowledge base increases.



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