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Do Part-time Employees Matter in the Restaurant Industry?

Part-timer Effect

In 2018, Joung, Choi, and Taylor incorporated employment status to see how restaurant employees' job-related attitudes and behaviors differ.¹ Owing to the changes in economic, demographic, and social conditions in the U.S., there has been a substantial increase of non-standard work arrangements such as part-time, contingent, and temporary work in the restaurant industry. According to the United States Census Bureau, about one-third of restaurant employees work part-time due to the business model and employees' need for flexibility between their job and personal endeavors.² In addition to the high proportion of part-time employees, several factors lead to a high turnover rate in the restaurant industry: 1) the current thriving economy (i.e., more available job opportunities), 2) employing teenagers (1.6 million teenage restaurant workers)³, and 3) employing a high proportion of students (27% of restaurant employees are enrolled in school).² According to the National Restaurant Association, the overall turnover rate in the restaurant industry was 72.9% (quits – 53.5%; layoffs – 16.7%; other separations – 2.7%) in 2016.^{4,5} This rate has been increasing since 2010 (56.4%), which is right after the 2008-9 worldwide economic downturn.⁶

Job-related Attitudes of Part-timers

This study found the differences in job-related attitudes between full-time and part-time employees and addressed the importance of organizational development and rewards on part-time employees' job satisfaction and commitment.

- Part-time employees' perceptions of organizational vision, training/development opportunities, rewards/benefit, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment were considerably lower than those of full-time employees.
- Part-time employees' turnover intention was significantly higher than that of full-time employees.

These findings clearly indicated that part-time employees were less satisfied with their current job situations as compared to their counterparts.

Turnover of Part-timers

This study also found that none of the predictors of employee turnover intention in the part-time employee group had any impact on lowering turnover intention. This finding implies that the high turnover intention of part-time employees is inevitable. Interestingly, organizational development and rewards/benefit did have a significant impact on part-time employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment but not their turnover rate. Furthermore, organizational development and part-time employees' job satisfaction had a significant impact on their organizational commitment. As the Service Profit Chain Theory suggested, more satisfied and committed employees eventually provide a better quality of service to their customers^{7,8}; therefore, restaurant owners/managers need to pay more attention to satisfying their employees no matter what their employment status is.

What should restaurant professionals do?

Given that most part-time employees work at the front line and are in direct contact with customers, properly managing part-time employees is critical to the success of the business.

The study findings provide several important human resource practices.

- Restaurant managers sometimes overlook their part-time employees but must realize that they have a great potential to transform the business. Lower satisfaction with training and development in part-time employees may be because they have fewer opportunities for career progression/development, career planning, and development programs. By offering training/development opportunities, part-time employees grow in expertise, and, in turn, the business grows as well.
- Quick lessons before the shift, hands-on training during slow business hours and allowing workers to shadow experienced employees can help part-time employees learn the full breadth of the business.

- A clear proposition and execution of rewards/benefit to part-time employees also lead to a successful operation of the restaurant due to increases in their job satisfaction and commitment to the business.
- Restaurant owners/managers should understand that customers do not care whether the front-line employees are full-time or part-time. They just want to receive the service expected from the operation. In the restaurant industry, all employees are valuable assets to the organization.

Thus, it is essential to stress the importance of motivating employees increasing their satisfaction and commitment, thus, ideally improving performances and a more profitable and successful organization.

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