

## Cross-Utilization:



## Leveraging Your Workforce to Fill the Gaps

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FocusED is published by UniFocus and highlights topics of interest to labor-intensive, service-oriented businesses.

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# Taking a Fresh Look at an OLD PRACTICE



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**I**n this edition of FocusED, we discuss the topic of cross-training and cross-utilizing staff. This is not a new topic and is done to greater or lesser degrees in a variety of hospitality / service operations. It's probably used most in small, owner-operated businesses (think family pizzerias, as an example) as everyone did everything to make larger profits.

As businesses became more sophisticated and had more moving parts, work started to become specialized and, in many environments, supported by union contracts that added structure and specific job classes. Dishwasher, steward, line cook, cashier, host, house person, and shampooer, to name a few. And, not surprisingly, jobs became more boring and, to some degree, monotonous.

Just think about a child in school. Can you imagine how boring studying math for six hours would be? *Really!* But instead, our children are taught various subjects throughout the same day, not just because there are different topics to learn, but because it is simply more interesting. This becomes



a key reason to look to cross-utilization: it makes the day more interesting. Or, as some would say, it provides job enrichment.

Obviously the smaller the overall staff, the more important cross-utilization becomes. In the simplest of senses, there aren't eight hours' worth of dishwashing to do on a shift at a Garden Inn. So, the employee is asked to do other tasks, which may even include food preparation. Thirty-five years ago at a hotel in Atlanta, after breakfast, the server staff would work in the kitchen doing salad and vegetable prep. It made their jobs more inter-

esting, they were paid a higher rate per hour when working in the kitchen, and they increased their knowledge of the luncheon menu. A win-win all around.

In this Atlanta hotel example, employees that worked in another job were paid a higher rate to compensate them for that work or, in essence, were paid for the additional skill they had developed. This took training and commitment on the part of the staff and the employer, but it paid off in the long run with lower overall costs (less cooks) and lower turnover due to more interesting work and higher pay. Commonly called "pay for skill," this practice has been around for longer than I have been in the business world. It has even been incorporated in some union agreements; when a person works another job for more than two hours, he/she is paid at the higher rate. Sadly though, pay for skill is very underutilized in the hospitality industry. But, I think that will change soon.

One of the advantages of cross-utilization, is that it improves productivity and, therefore, decreases operating costs. Not much different from that family pizzeria I mentioned above, but it gets more difficult as the business gets more complex. For example, what if a front desk agent became the host in the restaurant at 11 a.m.? What if the steward was a bus person at low volumes or did food preparation at times? What if there were no banquet-specific housemen, and housemen did set up, tear down, and housekeeping activities, such as vacuuming and other cleaning tasks? One hotel chain has the bell staff deliver room service orders. The list can go on and on, only limited by one's imagination and the technology available to the organization.

One of the reasons cross-utilization is going to be incorporated and formally made part of many companies' standard operating procedures is that operating costs are increasing due to minimum wage increases as well as benefit costs. Operations will have to find a means of offsetting some of the increases, and

cross-utilization is a great starting point. As noted, it can reduce operating costs as well as enrich jobs and reduce monotony if properly applied. In some cases, millennials will also have an impact on this as they look to get more involved in organizations, understand more of the business, and be more stimulated throughout the day. And before I forget, an organization that embraces the practice of cross-utilization will also see a marked jump in teamwork, which also positively impacts customer satisfaction.

Cross-utilization is nothing new as the banquet captain has been using restaurant staff for years, but the practice can be expanded to all aspects of the business with measurably positive effects. We hope you enjoy our latest offering and take a hard look at your operations to see where this practice can help you improve your bottom line

Best regards,

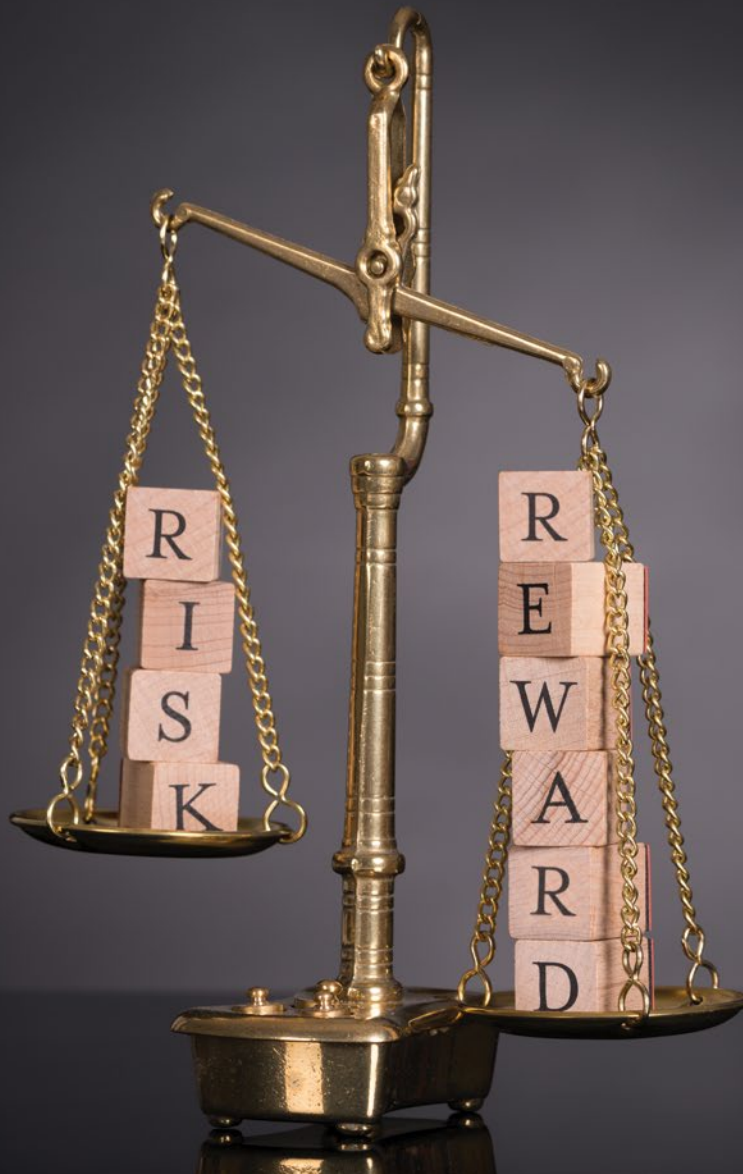


Mark





# *Employee Impact:* **Weighing the Effects of Cross-Utilization**



**G**enerally, cross-training and cross-utilizing employees is considered to be positive on many levels. Hotels gain labor efficiencies, and employees experience and develop in a new job and are able to understand the operations better. However, there are opponents to cross-training that will try to argue against the practice and point out the barriers, such as the presence of unions in the organization.

One common argument is that there will be a loss of focus from being overworked. To my knowledge, this argument has never been supported by research; it exists only as an opinion provided to keep employees in place. In fact, cross-training increases an employee's understanding of the overall business operations. In many employee surveys, a common issue is that employees either do not feel part of a team in their department or they feel that not all departments in their organization work together. Hotels have found that cross-training employees helped reduce this feeling of isolation, both within the department and across departments. When employees have cross-trained, worked with other employees in a different environment, and experienced a new job, they are more likely to understand the demands of other jobs and departments.

Another argument against cross-utilization is that it results in poor employee morale, resulting from internal competition and loss of job security. Not only is this not supported by research but there's research that refutes this argument, and perhaps the greatest benefit of cross-training is through improved employee morale and engagement. A key indicator of employee engagement is that the employee feels he/she is accomplishing personal and professional goals. Items that are strongly correlated with this aspect



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of employee engagement include training, professional development, and the possibility of advancement through promotion within the organization, all of which can be achieved through cross-training. When an employee is cross-trained within a department, he/she is introduced to other jobs and builds a foundation of understanding for a variety of jobs. This understanding strengthens the employee's skillset and opens the door for advancement to higher positions. At the department-head level, the opportunity to cross-train in other departments again strengthens the foundation of skills and makes the employee a more likely candidate for advancement into executive committee roles. Job security is also increased by the fact that an employee is more able to perform multiple duties of multiple jobs instead of just one job.



A third argument is that an employee should be paid more since they are doing more work. However, the employee is not, "doing more work;" they are simply doing different work. Certainly, if within a union agreement, one position gets paid more than another, an employee should receive the pay differential while cross-training. Generally, employees want to learn more and they desire to

do different jobs; pay, therefore, is not an issue. If an employee feels that they are being forced into cross-training and wants more money, he/she probably isn't a good candidate for the investment and should be encouraged to remain exclusively in their current job. The key is for employers to understand and identify these two different employee types. There may be no greater demoralizer than to keep an employee who wants development, limited



to a single job. The employee isn't gaining the skills he/she craves and will most likely be unengaged and seek employment elsewhere.

A final argument is that many unions stipulate that an employee has one job. Those of us who have worked in union hotels certainly know this and how this impacts our business. As a contract stipulation, it must be honored. Similar to the previous argument, there are employees who have the one job and only want to perform the one job. That is understandable, and as long as performance is positive, the union stipulations must be honored. But, as described above, it's important that employees who desire additional job skills be allowed the opportunity to cross-train and develop new skills. This will increase the engagement and commitment to the hotel as well as the union. If a union agreement strictly stifles this type of learning, they are doing a disservice to the organization and, more importantly, the union employee.



## Author's Bio

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# Cross- Training Q&A: Benchmark Hospitality



**W**hile some hotel companies are just now testing the cross-training waters, others, like Benchmark Hospitality International, have embraced the practice for years. The Texas-based management company uses cross-training not only to create efficiencies, but to enhance the advancement opportunities of its 6,500+ employees. We spoke with Calvin Banks, Benchmark's director of training & development, to learn more.

**What led you to implement cross-training?**

Cross-training has always been a part of our culture. It was a natural fit as our focus is great service, and this is done through efficiencies. In addition, career growth and training are at the forefront of all we do. Our learning and development promise is "Benchmark Builds Futures." Cross-training is a vital part of building the futures of our team members.

**How has the practice affected employee engagement?**

Cross-training leads to higher engagement scores as employees feel the company really cares about their growth and development.

**How about service?**

Engaged employees deliver great service. Also, cross-training allows employees to see how their contributions affect the overall service. Simply put, they don't work in a silo. For example, a housekeeper cross-training at the front desk is able to see how the work they do as a housekeeper affects the front desk and the guests' check-in experience.

**Guest Satisfaction?**

Higher employee scores lead to higher guest scores. Cross-trained employees are engaged, knowledgeable, and confident, positively impacting the service they deliver and, ultimately, the guest experience.



Calvin Banks

Director of Training and  
Development,  
Benchmark Hospitality  
International



### **Productivity?**

Productivity increases when employees are engaged. You also have a well-informed employee, which creates efficiencies. When things happen and you need someone to jump in, there are multiple team members who can pick up the slack. Imagine a banquet function that is short on servers. Instead of bringing in temps, you can reach out to your cross-trained servers to assist with the banquet. This not only creates a better experience for the guest, it also saves the organization money.

### **Employee turnover?**

Our employees know we are invested in them and, as long as there is a career plan in place, there is no need for them to look someplace else for advancement. However, we do see positive turnover — individuals moving to other positions and other properties within the Benchmark organization.

**Have there been challenges?**

Nothing is perfect. It costs money and time to cross-train. However, we understand that an investment in our employees' future is an investment in the property and the organization.

**In your experience, are there certain jobs/functions that pair particularly well?**

Most hourly positions lend themselves well to cross-training. A few combinations to consider include front desk agents and reservations, banquet servers and restaurant servers, and concierge and front desk.

**What advice would you offer other hotels considering cross-utilizing employees?**

Understanding your employees is the key to cross-training. Not everyone can handle any position and you need to know who has the right skill set to take on an additional role. If you do so, at the end of the day, cross-training is a win-win for the employee and the company.

**Do you think cross-utilizing staff will become the hospitality industry norm?**

I believe it's the norm already.

**Author's Bio**

*Calvin Banks is the Director of Training and Development at Benchmark Hospitality International. He has more than two decades of experience within hotel management, food & beverage, and entertainment and has previously held roles at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs and for Gaylord Hotels.*

*Mr. Banks is a Certified Hospitality Trainer through the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute, and a certified instructor through Development Dimensions International. He is a former president of the Council of Hotel and Restaurant Trainers, and he currently is a member of the Education and Certification Advisory Committee for the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute as well as the Department of Labor competency model panels for both the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation and the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. Banks has been named a "40 Under 40 Rising Star" by Full Service Restaurant Magazine and received the Doctorate of Food Service Award from the North American Food Equipment Manufacturers Association.*

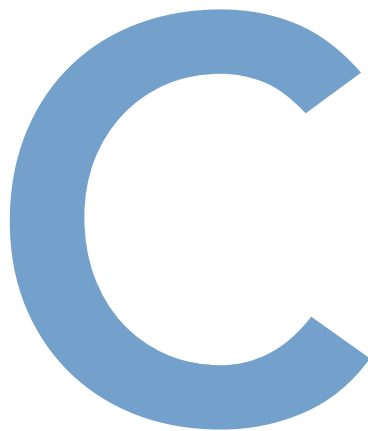


# *Stretching* Your Workforce

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

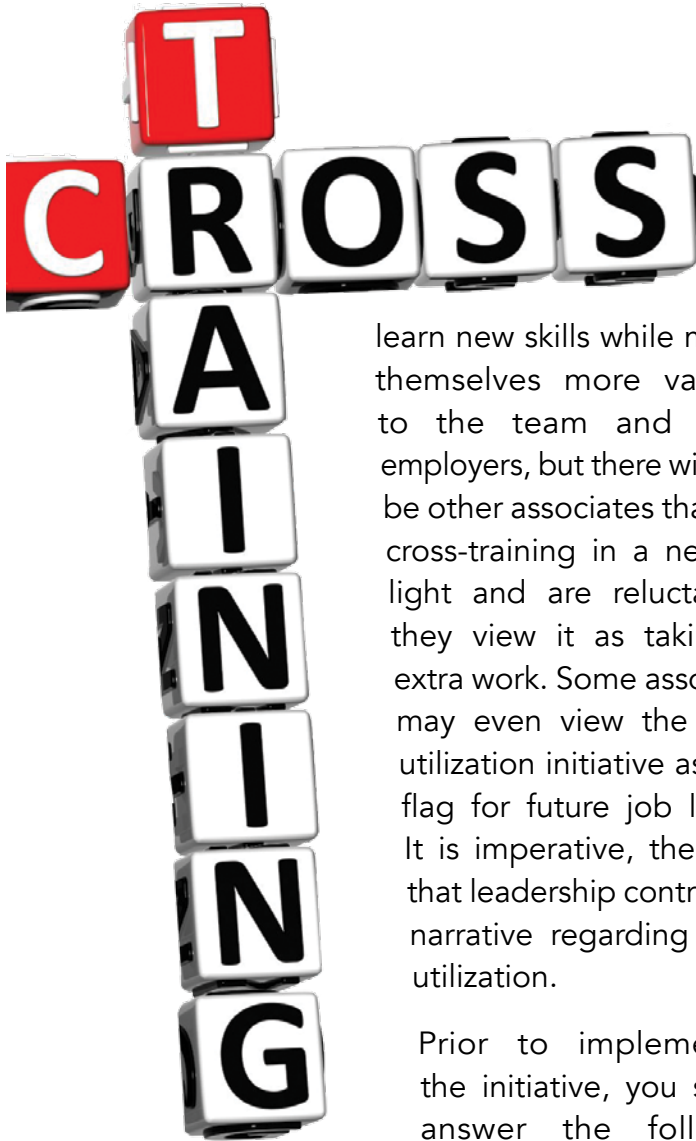
positioned to ensure service continues with minimized disruption.

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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# Who Else is Cross-Training?

## Southwest Airlines

**Southwest Airlines cross-trains employees as one method for building leadership.**

Lowenstein, Michael. *The Customer Advocate and the Customer Saboteur: Linking Social Word-of-mouth, Brand Impression, and Stakeholder Behavior*. Milwaukee: American Society for Quality, Quality Press, 2011.



## Marlin Steel

**Marlin Steel cross-trains their employees to prevent tasks from becoming dull and tedious.**

"How Cross-Training Drives Employee Engagement in Manufacturing Jobs." Marlin Steel. January 20, 2015. Accessed August 10, 2016. <https://www.marlinwire.com/blog/how-cross-training-drives-employee-engagement-in-manufacturing-jobs>.

## United States Navy

**Navy cross-utilizes engineers so they can handle all scenarios when on a ship with limited capacity.**

Welsh, Trevor. "Cross-Training, Teamwork Keep Independence Engineers at Full Throttle." United States Navy. April 19, 2012. Accessed August 10, 2016. [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=66538](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=66538).



## Hospitals

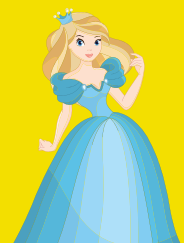
**Many hospitals cross-train to reduce workforce costs while improving quality of care.**

Mendez de Leon, Daphne and Judy A. Klauzer Stroot. "Using Nursing Resource Teams to Improve Quality of Care." HFM. August 2013.

## Disney

**Disney cross-utilizes executives on the front lines, allowing leaders to "walk in the shoes" of employees.**

Jones, Bruce. "Learning from the Front Lines of Customer Service." Harvard Business Review. March 8, 2016. Accessed August 10, 2016. <https://hbr.org/sponsored/2016/03/learning-from-the-front-lines-of-customer-service>.





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