

Restaurant Consulting Playbook

A practical guide by Chef Ryan Hartel

Introduction

Running a restaurant isn't just about great food — it's about **systems, efficiency, and profitability**.

I've worked across kitchens, events, catering, and food media, and I've seen countless restaurants struggle not because of a lack of talent, but because of unclear processes and unfocused menus.

This playbook is designed for **owners and head chefs** who want to tighten their menu, streamline operations, and improve service so the restaurant can run cleaner, smoother, and more profitably.

1. Menu Clarity & Focus

Why it matters:

A scattered menu leads to wasted ingredients, slow service, inconsistent dishes, and lost revenue.

How to optimize:

- **Audit every dish:** Identify low performers or overly complex items.
- **Simplify ingredients:** Reduce overlap to cut waste and improve prep speed.
- **Focus on core strengths:** Highlight your best-selling or signature dishes.
- **Seasonal adjustments:** Keep the menu dynamic but manageable.

Actionable Tip:

Create a "menu matrix" tracking profitability, prep time, and popularity to make informed decisions.

Consulting Truth:

A clean, focused menu is easier for staff to execute and easier for customers to love.

2. Systems & Kitchen Workflow

Why it matters:

Even the best chefs fail in messy, chaotic kitchens. Efficient systems save time, reduce stress, and increase consistency.

Key focus areas:

- **Prep & mise en place:** Standardize daily prep lists and station organization.
- **Inventory management:** Implement regular stock checks and clear storage protocols.
- **Recipe standardization:** Ensure every dish is consistent, regardless of who cooks it.
- **Service coordination:** Communicate kitchen timing with front-of-house effectively.

Actionable Tip:

Map your kitchen workflow and identify bottlenecks. Streamline stations and designate clear responsibilities.

Consulting Truth:

A kitchen that flows smoothly feels calm and controlled — which translates into better food and happier staff.

3. Service Excellence & Front-of-House Alignment

Why it matters:

A great meal can be ruined by poor service. Service standards need to match the kitchen's level of execution.

How to optimize:

- **Training & SOPs:** Create clear, repeatable procedures for greeting, order taking, and table service.
- **Communication tools:** Use checklists, service notes, and pre-service meetings.
- **Team culture:** Encourage ownership, accountability, and teamwork.
- **Feedback loops:** Collect guest and staff feedback regularly for continuous improvement.

Actionable Tip:

Hold weekly front-of-house and back-of-house meetings to review service, menu, and any issues.

Consulting Truth:

A restaurant is only as strong as the alignment between kitchen and service teams.

Final Word from Chef Ryan

Running a restaurant successfully is about **discipline, clarity, and alignment**. A focused menu, clean systems, and excellent service don't just improve efficiency — they boost profitability, staff morale, and customer satisfaction.

This playbook isn't a silver bullet. It's a roadmap for owners and head chefs ready to take control of their operations and deliver consistently outstanding results.

What This Playbook Is

- Practical, experience-driven guidance
- Focused on actionable changes that immediately impact your restaurant
- Designed for owners and head chefs ready to improve their bottom line

What This Playbook Is Not

- A theoretical textbook
- A one-size-fits-all plan
- A guarantee

The results come from applying the steps consistently. This guide points the way.

— **Chef Ryan Hartel**