A four-step guide to developing standards of performance (SOPs)

Often described as agreed, repeatable ways of doing something, SOPs ensure consistency in service levels. For a cost-effective way of helping to deliver an efficient breakfast operation, follow this four-step process to develop your SOPs.

1.
Develop

2.
Apply

3.
Measure

4.
Improve

Continuous improvement ➤

1: Develop

A standard is more than a list of instructions on how to carry out a task, such as how to set up a table or how to fold a napkin. Instructions concentrate on the 'how to', while the standard is the 'what'. The standard defines what you want to achieve as opposed to how you are going to achieve it. Developing standards, and then working to them, will help identify where potential weaknesses exist or where there are areas for improvement.

When reviewing or developing breakfast SOPs, considerations include customer expectations, the capabilities and skills of employees, the resources required to deliver on the standards and current government guidelines.

Breakfast 'moments of truth' may include:

- General customer care
- Safety & security
- Operational hygiene
- Handling, using and storing equipment
- Handling, using and storing cleaning materials
- Preparation for service
- Greeting and seating
- Taking the order
- Carrying
- Serving food items
- Serving beverages
- Clearing tables
- Billing and payment
- Complaint handling

a) Know your breakfast customer

Use customer feedback and insights to understand what customers like and dislike about your breakfast offering, how satisfied they are with current service delivery, what's working well and what needs to be fixed.

You can assess customer satisfaction and expectations by looking back at previous comments and complaints, using questionnaires, and conducting surveys, focus groups and site visits to corporate guests.

b) Breakfast 'moments of truth'

Review the complete customer journey for breakfast. Identify all the 'moments of truth' where the customer has an experience. You have a critical opportunity to impress or disappoint customers at each point of interaction. Focus initially on the areas where you can make a difference and on those that are important for success.

c) Knowing the needs of the department

As you develop standards, ask yourself how you will know if the standard is right, if it meets your departmental expectations. Can you deliver on this target? Do you have sufficiently trained employees on duty during the times when there is a rush for breakfast? What about when employees are caught up with other tasks: seating guests, answering the telephone, dealing with room service enquiries, etc.

Apart from staffing levels and skills, you should adequately plan for smooth service delivery by making sure that employees have the right tools and equipment to perform to the standard, for example, sufficient utensils for mise-en-place, appropriate cleaning materials, up to date technology, etc.

d) Government guidelines

A further consideration is the impact of legislation and government guidelines. In areas such as hygiene, health and safety your standards will be largely defined by issues outside your control. These legislative issues will need to be incorporated into the standard to ensure compliance.

Using the MARC approach will lead to standards that are:

MEASURABLE
The standard should be measurable by quality, quantity and timeliness. The more specifically a standard is defined, the more measurable it will be.

ACHIEVABLE
The standard must be reasonable and attainable and should never be so easy that it requires no significant effort, or so difficult that it requires superhuman effort.

RELEVANT
The standard must be designed to create a benefit for the customer and must be relevant to your particular operation, not adopted/copied/borrowed from another.

CONTROLLABLE
Accomplishing the standard must be within the control of a specific department and the measurement tools for accomplishing the desired result must be set up.

Example of a standard for greeting and seating

Start by defining precisely what the overall standard is for the area in question.

Now look at what must be done to achieve this standard, in other words, the procedure.

Follow this by identifying, in greater detail, the measurable tasks that must be carried out for each of these key steps.

You can use a mix of words and visuals and your operational standard for greeting and seating should now begin to look like the example (on the next page).

Establishing operational standards of performance and making them part of the way work is carried out will take time. However, rather than wait until complete and 'perfect' standards are developed, you should develop your operational standards of performance progressively. Publish standards in areas of greater importance or impact first, i.e. those critical for operational success.

Greeting and seating for breakfast

Our standard is:
All guests are greeted in a timely and friendly manner, then seated in an efficient and polite way.
Government guidelines regarding PPE and physical distancing are adhered to.

How to achieve it	How we will know it is done correctly:
1. **Podium / reception area is manned**	• Podium/reception area is located at the restaurant entrance • Podium/reception area is clean and sanitised • Podium/reception area has appropriate signage and daily guest list • Podium/reception area is manned, and employee is wearing correct uniform and PPE

2. **Acknowledge and greet guests as soon as they arrive, with a smile**	• All guests will be welcomed within one minute of arrival
	• All employees welcome guests with a smile (even when wearing a mask) and establish good eye contact
	• Employees use the correct greeting (company verbiage)
	   • Speak a little louder especially if wearing a cloth mask, which can block sound
	   • Modulate the tone of words to help convey warmth and friendliness
	   • Talk a little slower, rushed speech behind masks can interfere with understanding and frustrate a guest
	   • Use simple language
	• Guests are addressed by their names (if known)

3. **Establish if the guest requires breakfast**	• Employee enquires if the guest requires breakfast • Employee checks if the guest is a resident or walk in • Residents' room numbers are checked against the daily guest list and marked off • Guests on breakfast inclusive list should be processed through the till • If a non-resident, ensure employees record the bill as per consumption
4. **Lead guests to table and ensure they are happy with table allocated**	• Employee walks in front of the guest ensuring physical distancing and leads them to their table • Employee ensures the table has signage to indicate that it has been cleaned, sanitised and is ready for use • Employee asks if they are happy with the table allocated
5. **Seat guests, explain service and present menus**	• Employee offers seating assistance only if appropriate and safe to do so • Process for service of breakfast is explained (flow of service, wearing of masks etc.) • Clean menus are placed on the table and guests are informed of any chefs' specials, healthy options, additional-cost luxury dishes, etc. • Employee enquires if they can be of any further assistance • Employee wishes the guest an enjoyable breakfast • Employee removes table sign

2: Apply

Once standards have been developed and written up, the next step is their application to every breakfast service. This entails:

- **Empower and train service providers**

Train front-line employees so that they have the authority and accountability to make the decisions that matter to customers. Remember that employees cannot be responsive to customers if they are overly restricted by rules and regulations or if they are not encouraged to be innovative and to take measured risks.

- **Communicate standards of performance**

Operational standards of performance let your employees know the level of performance expected of them. Therefore, SOPs must be clear, easy to understand and effectively communicated to employees.

Communication methods can include:
- Posters
- Pamphlets
- Newsletters
- Meetings
- Email
- Training sessions
- Briefings
- Shift changeover meetings
- Mobile apps
- Online learning
- Bulletin boards

Always look for innovative and cost-effective ways to communicate with your employees, taking account of their characteristics and needs.

3: Measure

To know if your standards work you must measure how well actual performance relates to the standards.

An internal audit is one of the best tools for this. Carried out monthly, it's an honest appraisal of how staff feel they deliver against the criteria set out in the standard and can help identify gaps in performance.

Taking our earlier example of greeting and seating, the following table presents an auditing tool for measuring staff performance on greeting and seating. The extra columns allow you to use it for multiple staff at the same time.

The other main way of measuring performance against standards is to gather customer feedback. See the section on **Measuring Impact** for useful tools and templates.

The absence of complaints does not necessarily imply satisfaction with the service provided. Where service delivery is concerned complaints are only a partial indicator of quality.

Audit checklist – measuring staff performance against SOPs

Our standard is:

All guests are greeted in a timely and friendly manner, then seated in an efficient and polite way.
Government guidelines in relation to the wearing of PPE and physical distancing are adhered to.

Breakfast Service Observation Checklist							
Mark Yes/No for each team member	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Podium/reception area is manned							
● Podium/reception area is located at the restaurant entrance							
● Podium/reception area is clean and sanitised							
● Podium/reception area has appropriate signage and daily guest list							
● Podium/reception area is manned, and employee is wearing the correct uniform and PPE							
Acknowledge and greet guests as soon as they arrive, with a smile							
● All guests will be welcomed within one minute of arrival							
● All employees welcome guests with a smile (even when wearing a mask) and establish good eye contact							
● Employees use the correct greeting (company verbiage)							
● Speak a little louder especially if they are wearing a cloth mask, which can block sound							
● Modulate the tone of their words to help convey warmth and friendliness							
● Talk a little slower, rushed speech behind masks can interfere with understanding and frustrate a guest							
● Use simple language							
● Guests are addressed by their names (if known)							

	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Establish if the guest requires breakfast							
● Employee enquires if the guest requires breakfast							
● Employee checks if the guest is a resident or walk in							
● Residents' room numbers are checked against the daily guest list and marked off							
● Guests on breakfast inclusive list should be processed through the till							
● If a non-resident, ensure employees are made aware to record the bill as per consumption							
Lead guests to the table and ensure they are happy with table allocated							
● Employee walks in front of the guest ensuring physical distancing whilst leading them to their table							
● Employee ensures the table has signage to indicate that it has been sanitised and is ready for use							
● Employee asks if they are happy with the table allocated							
Seat guests, explain service and present menus							
● Employee offers seating assistance only if appropriate and safe to do so							
● Process for service of breakfast is explained (flow of service, wearing of masks, etc.)							
● Clean menus are placed on the table and guests are informed of any chefs' specials, healthy options, additional-cost luxury dishes etc.							
● Employee enquires if they can be of any further assistance							
● Employee wishes the guest an enjoyable breakfast							
● Employee removes table sign							

4: Action

Having developed ways to measure performance against your standards you must monitor performance constantly. Doing so should quickly identify problems with customer service.

All employees should be involved in finding solutions to these problems. Otherwise, there is a tendency for busy employees to lose sight of the ultimate objective of performance improvement and treat the measurement activity as a mere data collection exercise for management.

- Identify the problems (performance gaps) that need to be addressed and prioritise them.
- Identify the cause of each problem and gather all the facts. Is the problem customer related (service), employee related (skills) or resource related?
- Identify how the problem will be eliminated. Look at possible solutions and compare the pros and cons for each.
- Set targets and timeframes for improvement.
- Allocate responsibility for implementing the action points.
- Communicate the action plan to relevant staff to ensure understanding and commitment.
- Keep the action plans for review purposes.

Dealing with complaints

Every business needs a clear and consistent procedure for dealing with complaints because they will inevitably arise. Staff should be familiar with this procedure.

Consider the following;

- Customers need to feel trusted and listened to when they complain.
- If the complaint is reasonable, apologise and offer a solution.
- Manage customer expectations; tell them when they will get an answer.
- Establish clear limits on when to say 'NO' to a customer.
- Record and report complaints (number and type).

Continuous improvement

Review your operational standards periodically to find new ways to improve services through initiatives such as:

- Using new technology where cost-effective.
- Cutting red tape.
- Using plain language.
- Re-examining and redesigning or streamlining workflow.
- Simplifying or getting rid of unnecessary rules and practices.