



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority



7

SOPs, TRAINING, & STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

Operational standards of performance (SOPs)

This topic at a glance...

Why are operational standards of performance (SOPs) important for breakfast? Learn how to develop them using a simple four stage process. Reflecting the important role of staff, there are articles on staff training and staff communications, while the support tools include **Tips on Communicating Effectively while Wearing Masks and Physically Distancing**, and templates for **Induction Training** and for the **Breakfast Pre-Shift Briefing**.

Why SOPs for breakfast are important

Standards of Performance (SOPs) for your breakfast operation are important at any time, but now more so than ever with changing consumer preferences and COVID-19 restrictions.

Essentially a summary of best practices, SOPs help ensure regulatory compliance for the safety of customers and staff and they drive continuous improvement in how we do things.

SOPs, however, mean nothing if they are not properly implemented. We often hear the expression "standards have slipped", but it's not the standard itself that has slipped, it's staff performance against the standard that has slipped.

A standard is an agreed, consistent way of doing something.

Operational SOPs ensure reliable and consistent service levels, which give customers confidence and make life more efficient for business operations and staff.

They are a cost-effective way of helping to deliver the breakfast operation.



Operational SOPs should be:

Meaningful to the people delivering the service and expressed in terms they can relate to

Based on consultation with the people delivering the service and, where possible, consultation with guests (e.g. through focus groups)

Attainable yet challenging and be based on analysis, in line with government recommendations and consistent with your goals

Affordable within available resources

Continually improving the customer experience and the cost effectiveness of service delivery

Published and made known to all teams concerned

Continually measuring performance & customer satisfaction for comparisons over time to demonstrate compliance and improvements

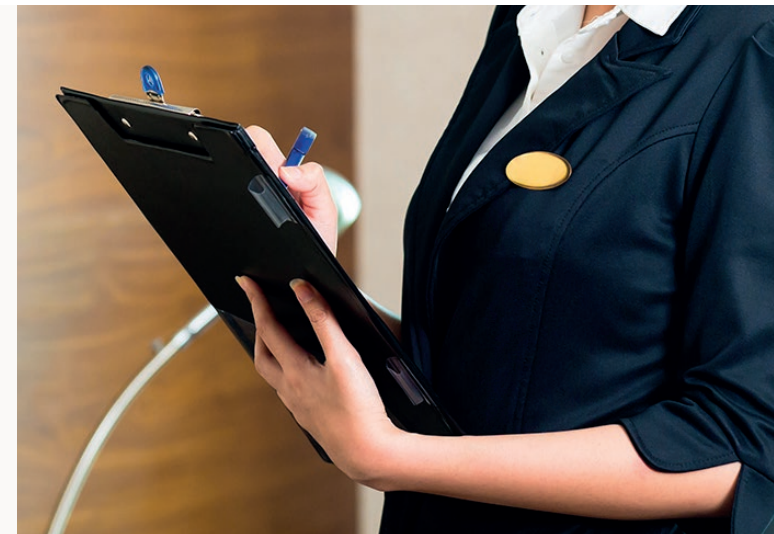
Reviewed and updated regularly and adjusted to reflect new circumstances/government guidelines

How to develop SOPs

Standards of Performance are created by bringing together:

1. The experience and expertise of employees
2. Government recommendations
3. Customer expectations

Whether you want to amend existing breakfast SOPs or to develop new ones, there is a structured four-part process to guide you. A summary of the four steps is outlined below and the full guide can be found in the supporting materials to this module.



See the support documents including;

- **A Sample Standard for Greeting and Seating Guests at Breakfast**
- **Audit checklist for Measuring Staff Performance against the Standard**



The four-step process to developing SOPs

1. Develop

Remember that the standard is the result; it's more about "what I want to achieve" than "how I am going to achieve it". Review any existing standards to see if they are working for you. Are your standards just a list of instructions on how to carry out a task (for example: how to set up a table, how to fold a napkin)? While these are important 'how to' training tools, the actual standard focuses on the 'what' – what you will have at the end of carrying out the instruction.

Key considerations when developing your standards are knowing your breakfast customer, consulting with customers and staff, and understanding the needs of the kitchen and service departments.

2. Apply

Operational SOPs are intended to let staff know the level of performance expected of them for breakfast service. Staff should also have the authority and accountability to make the decisions that matter to customers. Effective communication and training will equip staff in this regard.

3. Measure

The best way of knowing if your SOPs are working is by measuring staff performance against them:

- Observe staff performance during breakfast service (see the **Audit Checklist**)
- Conduct an internal audit where staff measure their actual performance against standards
- Gather guest feedback (see the section on **Guest Evaluation**)

No matter how good your SOPs are, occasional complaints will arise. Make sure your staff are trained in how to deal with complaints properly.

4. Improve

Setting customer-driven standards, and measuring how well your breakfast operation is doing, is an ongoing activity. When performance falls below the defined standard, find out the reasons why, put in place an appropriate solution and monitor performance to ensure the problem is not repeated. Doing so will continually drive efficiencies - sometimes it's all those small improvements that can make a big difference.

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3 top tips

1. Make sure that what your guest experiences are the standards you've written up, performed by well-trained, customer-focused employees, who are supported by the resources they need.
2. Share findings from performance audits and guest satisfaction surveys with staff – both for positive reinforcement of good performance and to identify how to fix underperformance.
3. Unrealistic standards don't serve anyone. If you can't deliver on customer expectations, they are dissatisfied. Better to under promise and over deliver than the other way round!



Staff communication



Staff are crucial to the roll-out of your new breakfast offering. A server who is uninformed or disinterested has a hugely negative impact on customer service, on upselling and on your profitability.

Training your staff and giving them the information they need to communicate with guests delivers results in guest satisfaction scores and in repeat sales.

Staff who show a genuine pride in the breakfast menu impact positively on the guest's breakfast experience.

A server who needs to go to the kitchen to check what the breakfast special is or to ask if a dish contains allergens or simply has no personal favourites on a menu, shows a disregard for your guests and for your efforts to reposition breakfast.

Tips to make sure you give the new offering the best possible opportunity:

1. Train all employees, not just the breakfast serving staff, on the breakfast menu or new offering. Doing so will mean that not only will staff have answers to the breakfast-related questions from guests, but that they will also feel comfortable and excited about telling guests about the amazing new menu that's on offer. Front of house staff, serving staff, bar staff, etc. will all play a role in understanding the new changes and the reasons behind the changes. Playing as a cohesive team to guests will show unity.
2. Have your team learn the menu. Inform the team about the producers you are working with, and importantly, what makes these producers so special. Telling a story about the producer, also tells a story about the menu. Tell the staff about the techniques used and cooking processes.
3. Give each member of staff a copy of the menu to keep, which they can read through and ask any questions on. Knowing the menu and the dishes and accompaniments means staff can give recommendations to guests.



4. Host a team tasting event (in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions). Show staff how each breakfast dish is served and allow them to taste each dish. This could be a great opportunity to host a breakfast meeting and let each member order a dish from the new menu while being educated on it.
5. When implementing changes to menu and breakfast ordering process, all staff should know what the process is for breakfast, from booking slots to ordering procedures. They should also know all breakfast and menu options, such as the grab and go, in-room dining etc. If seasonality is a feature on your menu, ensure that menu changes are relayed to staff on each new version.
6. Check there is an understanding of the menu items and where they are sourced from. When briefing staff, encourage them to ask questions and make sure they know how to pronounce each item, i.e. chorizo, pain au raisin etc. Have a pop quiz on food producers used - "which farm do we source our pork from?"
7. Give the staff the autonomy to advise guests on the new breakfast offering. Allow staff to freely sell the breakfast experience to guests. Providing staff with a good knowledge of the new offering, should not just serve to answer guest questions, but also gives staff the confidence to promote the breakfast experience during a guest interaction.
8. Encourage your team to enquire about the guest's breakfast experience. Just as staff may politely enquire, 'how was your meal last night?'— encourage staff to give breakfast the same weight and importance by enquiring how breakfast was. The responses will not only provide feedback to management, but also show guests that staff genuinely care about continuous improvement and take pride in the offering.



Give staff a sense of ownership about why your breakfast offering has changed. By creating **Breakfast Champion Employees**, you will directly impact guest satisfaction and upselling.

Staff training



Everyone – from employees to guests to suppliers – benefit when you implement an effective programme of staff training, not to mention the positive impact it has on your business reputation. Even on a small training budget, investing in your staff can drive down costs, make your operation more lean and efficient and help increase sales and profits, while improving customer satisfaction ratings.

A good training programme will bring your operational standards of performance (SOPs) to life through structured training and through daily on-the-job service briefings.

Warmth and hospitality during COVID-19

It's especially important in the current climate that staff don't lose sight of the importance of a warm welcome and friendly service.

Admittedly, with social distancing, Perspex screens and face coverings, it may feel a little more challenging, but all the more reason to remind staff about the power of a smile (even from behind a screen or mask)... remember you can judge a smile from a person's eyes!

This is also relevant if you switch to a served buffet station for breakfast – staff will need both culinary and hospitality skills in their dealings with guests.



Developing your staff and improving their skills through training can:

Increase productivity and efficiency

Increase revenue through staff upselling

Improve the quality of work

Reduce faults, waste or customer complaints

Positively affect staff morale, motivation, and engagement

Reduce staff turnover and absenteeism

Help your business adapt to change and prepare for growth

Provide you with a competitive advantage

Help attract top talent if you're seen to value and invest in your team

Induction training covers areas such as:

- Job skills: methods, timescales and expectations
- The basics: the things seasoned employees take for granted, such as; 'What's the routine for holidays? Where's the canteen? What's the dress code?'
- The mandatory information: health and safety and other essential or legal areas
- The business: your values, mission, goals, philosophy and so on

Getting to know other staff is an essential part of induction training. Relationships are the means by which organisations function.



Your breakfast host is the first salesperson the guest meets when they enter the restaurant.

Train them to upsell and recommend 'specials' when seating guests.

Induction training

Induction training is absolutely essential for new employees as it ensures that they settle in quickly and happily to a productive role.

Proper induction training is increasingly a legal requirement and, as a manager, it's your responsibility to ensure that it's properly planned and carried out.

It also lessens dependence on your time as employees who are not properly inducted need a lot more looking after. Failing to provide good induction training is a false economy.

A supporting **staff handbook** is a critical tool to new staff and should be provided at staff Induction. However, it's worth remembering, this should have been updated with all new HR policies and procedures that are reflective of new operating guidelines and protocols set out by Government for the Hospitality Sector in response to the 'Living with COVID' plan.

10 things to consider for induction training:

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1. Use lots of visuals - videos, photos, diagrams and colour. Avoid heavy, text-based training.
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2. Tell stories – they provide an emotional connection to information and are easy to remember.
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3. Use positive language - tell the new employee what they can do, rather than what they can't.
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4. Involve senior management - they need to be seen and involved as a way of welcoming new employees.
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5. Communicate your core values - staff should know and understand what your hotel stands for, its values and its culture.
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6. Focus on health and safety - let new employees know from the outset how important health and safety is to your hotel and why.
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7. Participative learning methods - give demonstrations and involve new employees. Ask questions that get them to relate to the training in terms of their own experiences.
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8. Standardise training - ensure consistency and avoid a situation where colleagues teach new starters bad habits and different standards of performance.
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9. Use a buddy system – pair the new employee up with an established employee to guide them.
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10. Training evaluation - confirm their understanding and get feedback on the training.

Buddy system

This is a great knowledge-sharing method whereby a new employee is assigned to an existing employee who will guide them through their first weeks in their new position.

It also provides the new employee with a reliable, enthusiastic, and ongoing single point of contact for any questions they may have. The immediate feeling of being part of the team will make a substantial difference in early workplace performance and long-term retention.



See the supporting document - **Template to Draw up an Induction Training Plan.**

The mutual exchange of ideas enhances the organisation by encouraging innovative thinking and giving the new employee the opportunity to offer confidential feedback.



Five benefits of a buddy system:

1. New employee feels at ease. Quickly understands systems and processes by getting answers to questions on the spot.
2. Boosts confidence. Informal chats with a more experienced employee (buddy) gives reassurance and job satisfaction.
3. Increases productivity. Employees will be happier, more confident and ultimately more productive.
4. Improves employee retention. Helps employees feel supported and valued.
5. Gains insights and innovation. New employee can share past experiences, including knowledge, tips and processes that your team may not have considered.

Training & standards reinforcement through Pre-Shift meetings

Taking a few minutes before a shift to brief staff and make sure staff are well prepared, briefed and ready to serve customers is one of the most beneficial management and staff performance tools.

These meetings are an essential component for smooth, efficient operations and restaurant customer service.

The most effective form of communication is still a face-to-face encounter and Pre-Shift are a perfect example that nothing replaces interacting in person.

These meetings don't need to be tedious or long; they simply need to hit the 'top priorities' list for the day. They can set the tone for the entire breakfast shift and are one of the best ways to ensure your team is focused on the same goals and provides consistency in service.

- It's essential that staff know the menu well, including ingredients, specials, local suppliers and so on.
- Also, that they see service as an opportunity to upsell.

The Pre-Shift briefing is an ideal opportunity to remind staff of both points.



Use the **Pre-Shift Briefing Template** in the supporting materials to this module to plan and get the most from your briefings.

Pre-Shift briefing should be

- Max 10 minute duration
- Goal focused
- Interactive
- Relevant to staff
- Remember WIIFM (what's in it for me?)!

Structure the Pre-Shift meeting like this:

Tell – Show – Do - Review

Ongoing training investment & supporting staff retention

The key to sustained quality and standards and a staff team that is efficient and works effectively as a team, to support each other to drive customer satisfaction and sales, is one that is invested in, on an ongoing basis, with training. This applies to not only front of house teams, but equally those based in back of house roles, from culinary teams to Wash-up and kitchen porter staff.

In strong performing businesses, monthly staff meetings will practically always include a training topic, whether that is to review or refresh on standard operating procedures, training in new technology investment or looking at subjects like service to sales and new techniques and skills in upselling and attracting new customers. Remember everyone has a role to play in achieving business targets and this requires ongoing investment in your team.

Equally it's important in training to celebrate successes. Communicating positive feedback from customers and recognising staff that go the extra mile is also hugely important for morale and team performance and reflects the culture of a business. This is often very palpable to customers.

Investment in staff training also allows team members to progress in their roles and better themselves to identify and carve out a career path within your business. Retention of skilled staff in the Hospitality Industry is a key challenge and one which is very costly when it fails.

We recommend at the start of each year, as department managers and HODs that you prepare a structured training plan for your team for the year, perhaps on a quarterly basis. Not all aspects of training need to be led and provided for by a HR department. Equally linking staff's own investment in their training to their performance reviews is also key, as it is important to encourage a culture whereby everyone takes some responsibility and initiative for their own professional development. The business should make a point of encouraging and recognising when this happens.

Fáilte Ireland's free online eLearning training resources

The [Fáilte Ireland e-learning hub](#) contains online self-directed eLearning training programmes designed to upskill and motivate teams. Programmes are short and modular style, and average 40 minutes with an online assessment. Covering areas such as operations, management and compliance, the programmes are available to employees of all levels, from frontline to management.

The e-learning hub also contains the **Fáilte Ireland Accredited Service Excellence (ASE) programme**. The programme comprises interactive modules, checks for understanding and a final assessment of learning, with certification on successful completion. Each course or module requires 40-60 minutes to complete (depending on the pace of learner) and allows employees to undertake it at times that best suit them, either in a single sitting or in a combination of shorter sittings. The materials are enabled for mobile smartphones as well as other computer devices and supporting learning materials are available for them to save or print for their own reference.

3 top tips

1. The daily briefing before breakfast service is one of the best uses of your time. Do it **every** morning.
2. Before you teach your staff how to upsell, teach them why they need to upsell. Show them how low the profit margin is on breakfast and explain their key role in driving sales and efficiencies.
3. Be sure to evaluate and measure the impact of your training programmes. Even if a training course is free to attend (online or offline), there's the opportunity cost of you or your team attending. The biggest cost is failing to implement what's learned.

