

# CAFÉ OWNER'S MANUAL

&

- Most Frequent Complaints About Coffee Shops
- Most Frequent Challenges Between Café Owners and Staff


*Coffee*  
**Academy**

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A woman is shown from the side, focused on harvesting coffee cherries. She is wearing a green long-sleeved shirt with a 'syngenta' logo, an orange headscarf, and a grey mesh cap. She is wearing red gloves and holding a green bucket filled with harvested coffee cherries. The background is a dense field of coffee plants with green leaves and clusters of cherries in various stages of ripeness (green, yellow, and red).

**“EVERY COFFEE WE ENJOY IS A TESTAMENT TO THE HARD  
WORK AND DEDICATION OF ORIGIN FARMERS, WHOSE  
CARE AND RESILIENCE MAKE EACH CUP POSSIBLE.”**



## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of our online magazine! This platform is an extension of my passion for coffee and my blog, Coffee Academy, where I share knowledge, tools, and insights for coffee enthusiasts and professionals.

In this inaugural issue, our main feature is the Café Owner's Manual—a practical guide for navigating the challenges of running a coffee shop, from improving service to managing staff and finances.

You'll also find:

- The Most Frequent Complaints About Coffee Shops
- The Most Frequent Challenges Between Café Owners and Staff

This magazine is about sharing knowledge and building a community around our shared love of coffee. Thank you for joining me on this journey. Let's brew success together!

*Safa Salehi*

COFFEE CONSULTANT & TRAINER





### The Coffee Sensory Vocabulary Series (Part 1)- CATA Method in Coffee Assessment

The Check-All-That-Apply (CATA) method is a sensory evaluation tool widely utilized across the food and beverage industries for profiling products. In the coffee sector; it captures a range of sensory attributes ...

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### The Ultimate Guide to Coffee Value Assessment (CVA)

The Physical Assessment focuses on evaluating the physical quality of green coffee beans. It helps identify defects, inconsistencies, and factors such as moisture content, size, and color that impact the coffee's overa...

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### Celebrating International Coffee Day: A Brew of Culture, Sustainability, and Community

October 1st marks a special day for coffee lovers around the globe, but what's the story behind International Coffee Day and the organization that brewed it into existence?

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[www.coffeeacademy.ca](http://www.coffeeacademy.ca)

At **Coffee Academy**, we are dedicated to fostering expertise, innovation, and transformation in coffee professionals, driven by our core values of knowledge, passion, and unwavering commitment to excellence.



# CAFÉ OWNER'S MANUAL

"A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO BUILDING A THRIVING COFFEE BUSINESS"

- Strategies to solve common café challenges.
- Comprehensive templates, checklists, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- Insights into leadership, growth, and data-driven decision-making.
- Practical case studies to showcase success.
- The most frequent complaints about coffee shops.



Running a successful coffee shop is both an art and a science. From crafting the perfect cup of coffee to managing staff, finances, and customer experiences, café owners face a unique set of challenges. This guide serves as a comprehensive resource for navigating these challenges, offering practical solutions, strategies, and tools to help café owners thrive.

## 1. Enhancing Customer Experience

### Why It Matters:

Customer experience is the foundation of a thriving coffee shop. A positive experience encourages repeat visits, fosters loyalty, and generates word-of-mouth marketing.

## 1.1 Speed of Service

**Common Issue:** Long wait times, especially during peak hours, frustrate customers.

### Solutions:

1. Redesign workflows to minimize unnecessary movement (e.g., use the “barista triangle” setup).
2. Introduce mobile ordering systems and self-service kiosks to streamline the process.
3. Pre-batch popular drinks during rush hours.

## 1.2 Drink Consistency

**Common Issue:** Customers notice differences in taste, temperature, or presentation.

### Solutions:

1. Standardize recipes with a detailed barista handbook.
2. Calibrate espresso machines and grinders daily.
3. Conduct regular training and cupping sessions to align staff on flavor profiles.

## 1.3 Ambiance and Comfort

**Common Issue:** Uncomfortable seating, loud environments, or poor lighting.

### Solutions:

1. Invest in ergonomic furniture and create diverse seating options (e.g., communal tables, lounge chairs).
2. Adjust lighting for a cozy atmosphere and install sound-absorbing materials.
3. Dedicate zones for work, socializing, and relaxation.

## 2. Streamlining Operations

### Why It Matters:

Efficient operations reduce costs, improve service quality, and create a positive work environment for staff.

### 2.1 Managing Peak Hours

**Common Issue:** Overwhelmed staff and long lines during busy times.

**Solutions:**

1. Analyze sales data to predict peak times and adjust staff schedules.
2. Simplify the menu to focus on high-demand items.
3. Implement express lanes for grab-and-go customers.

### 2.2 Preventing Equipment Breakdowns

**Common Issue:** Equipment failures disrupt service and increase costs.

**Solutions:**

1. Schedule preventive maintenance for espresso machines, grinders, and refrigerators.
2. Train staff to identify early warning signs.
3. Keep spare parts and partner with reliable repair technicians.

### 2.3 Reducing Inventory Wastage

**Common Issue:** Overstocking leads to waste, while understocking causes missed sales.

**Solutions:**

1. Use inventory management software to track stock levels and trends.
2. Regularly audit inventory and adjust orders based on data.
3. Offer promotions on slow-moving items to minimize spoilage.



### 3. Financial Management

#### Why It Matters:

Strong financial management ensures profitability and prepares your business for long-term success.

#### 3.1 Tracking Key Metrics

- 1. Cost of Goods Sold (COGS):** Maintain COGS at 25–35% for drinks and 30–40% for food.
- 2. Gross Profit Margin:** Aim for 65–75%.
- 3. Labor Cost Percentage:** Keep labor costs below 35% of revenue.
- 4. Average Transaction Value (ATV):** Increase by bundling items or upselling.

#### 3.2 Advanced Financial Strategies

- 1. Menu Engineering:** Focus on promoting high-margin “Star” items and replacing low-margin “Dogs.”
- 2. Dynamic Pricing:** Charge slightly higher prices during peak hours or for premium seating options.
- 3. Cash Flow Management:** Maintain an emergency fund covering three months of operating expenses.

## 4. Marketing and Branding

### Why It Matters:

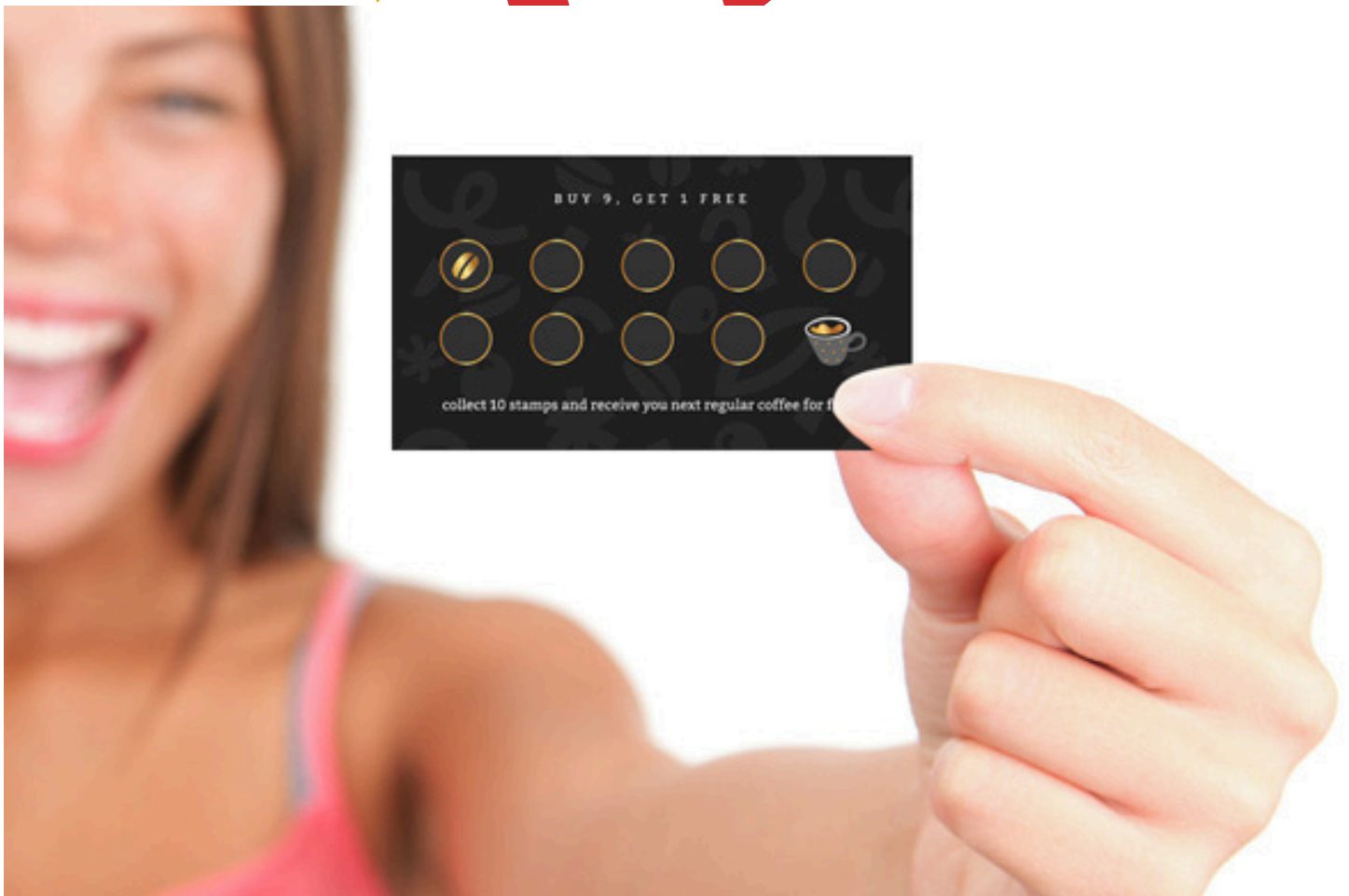
Effective marketing builds awareness, attracts new customers, and strengthens relationships with regulars.

### 4.1 Social Media Marketing

1. Post regularly on Instagram and Facebook, highlighting new menu items and behind-the-scenes content.
2. Run contests and giveaways (e.g., “Tag a friend for a chance to win free coffee”).

### 4.2 Loyalty Programs

1. Offer rewards for repeat visits, such as a free drink after 10 purchases.
2. Use digital tools to track customer purchases and provide personalized offers.





## 5. Sustainability Practices

### Why It Matters:

Sustainability is no longer optional—it's a necessity. Customers increasingly prefer businesses that align with eco-conscious values. Sustainable practices not only help the environment but also reduce costs, improve efficiency, and build a strong, ethical brand image that attracts loyal, environmentally aware customers.

### 5.1 Reducing Waste

#### Steps to Reduce Waste:

##### 1. Switch to Compostable Packaging:

- Use compostable cups, lids, straws, and utensils.
- Offer reusable cup incentives to encourage customers to bring their own mugs.
- Partner with suppliers specializing in eco-friendly materials.

##### 2. Implement a Recycling Program:

- Clearly label recycling bins for paper, plastics, and other materials.
- Train staff to separate recyclables from general waste.

##### 3. Compost Coffee Grounds and Food Scraps:

- Partner with local farmers or composting facilities to reuse coffee grounds as fertilizer.
- Use food waste for compost instead of sending it to landfills.

### 5.2 Ethical Sourcing

Ethical sourcing ensures that your coffee beans and other ingredients are grown and traded sustainably and fairly. Customers value transparency and prefer supporting businesses that align with these principles.

#### Steps to Source Ethically:

##### 1. Partner with Certified Suppliers:

- Use Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, or Organic-certified coffee.
- Ensure suppliers follow sustainable farming practices and provide fair wages.

##### 2. Support Local Producers:

- Source milk, baked goods, and other items from nearby farms or small businesses.
- Highlight locally sourced items on your menu to build community connections.

##### 3. Transparency in Sourcing:

- Share the story of your coffee beans, from farm to cup.
- Use marketing materials to showcase your commitment to ethical sourcing.

Pro Tip: Display sourcing certifications on your menu or website to build trust with customers.

### 5.3 Energy Efficiency

Reducing energy usage not only cuts operational costs but also reduces your carbon footprint. Small changes in equipment and processes can make a big difference.

#### Steps to Increase Energy Efficiency:

##### *1. Upgrade to Energy-Efficient Equipment:*

- Use ENERGY STAR-certified espresso machines, grinders, and refrigerators.
- Replace incandescent lights with LED bulbs.

##### *2. Optimize Equipment Usage:*

- Turn off unused appliances during slow hours.
- Schedule regular maintenance to ensure equipment runs efficiently.

##### *3. Switch to Renewable Energy:*

- Consider partnering with local renewable energy providers.
- Install solar panels if feasible for long-term cost savings.

#### Case Study:

Green Beans Café reduced its energy costs by 30% by replacing old equipment with energy-efficient models and installing LED lighting throughout the shop.

<https://greenbeancafe.ca/>

### 5.4 Water Conservation

Cafés use significant amounts of water for brewing, cleaning, and customer use. Efficient water management not only saves money but also protects a valuable resource.

#### Steps to Conserve Water:

##### *1. Install Low-Flow Faucets and Fixtures:*

- Use water-efficient taps and toilets to reduce daily water consumption.

##### *2. Reuse Greywater:*

- Collect water from equipment rinsing processes for non-drinking purposes, like cleaning floors.

##### *3. Monitor and Repair Leaks:*

- Regularly inspect pipes, faucets, and appliances for leaks.
- A dripping tap can waste hundreds of gallons of water annually.

### 5.5 Community Engagement

Sustainability isn't just about internal practices—it's about inspiring and involving your community.

#### Steps to Engage Your Community:

1. Host Sustainability Workshops.
2. Collaborate with Local Environmental Groups.
3. Customer Incentives.



## 6. Staff Management and Development

### Why It Matters:

Happy, motivated staff provide better service, stay longer, and contribute to a positive workplace culture.

### 6.1 Training and Onboarding

1. Implement a structured onboarding program with hands-on training.
2. Provide ongoing education, such as barista certifications or workshops.

### 6.2 Retaining Staff

1. Offer competitive wages and benefits.
2. Create growth opportunities, such as promotions to lead barista or manager roles.
3. Recognize hard work with incentives like performance bonuses or Employee of the Month awards.

### Pro Tips for Effective Staff Management in a Café:

1. Set Clear Expectations from Day One.
2. Communicate Regularly and Transparently.
3. Empower Employees with Training and Growth Opportunities.
4. Recognize and Reward Good Performance.
5. Foster a Positive Team Culture.
6. Balance Schedules Fairly.
7. Lead by Example.
8. Provide Constructive Feedback.
9. Anticipate and Resolve Conflicts Early.
10. Prioritize Staff Wellbeing.
11. Track and Celebrate Progress.

## 7. Tools, Templates, and SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)

### Why They Matter:

Running a coffee shop smoothly requires consistent processes and clear documentation. Tools, templates, and SOPs ensure efficiency, accountability, and high standards across all operations. They provide staff with clear guidance, reduce errors, and save time on repetitive tasks.

### 7.1 Essential Tools and Software

#### 1. Point of Sale (POS) Systems

- Purpose: Streamline orders, manage inventory, and track sales data.
- Examples: Square, Toast, Lightspeed.

#### 2. Scheduling Apps

- Purpose: Simplify staff scheduling and allow for easy shift swaps.
- Examples: When I Work, Deputy, Homebase.

#### 3. Inventory Management Tools

- Purpose: Track stock levels and minimize wastage.
- Examples: MarketMan, BevSpot, Excel templates.

### 4. Customer Feedback Platforms

- Purpose: Gather and analyze customer feedback.
- Examples: Google Forms, Typeform, or POS-integrated surveys.

### 5. Cleaning Logs and Checklists

- Purpose: Track daily, weekly, and monthly cleaning tasks.
- Examples: Laminated checklists, task management apps like Trello.

### 7.2 Ready-to-Use Templates

### 7.3 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

1. Opening Procedures
2. Closing Procedures
3. Customer Service SOP
4. Drink Preparation SOP
5. Health and Safety SOP

#### Pro Tips:

- Digitize Where Possible.
- Keep It Visual.
- Review Regularly.
- Train Consistently.
- Monitor Usage.



MOST FREQUENT

# COMPLAINTS ABOUT COFFEE SHOPS

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Here are **The Most Frequent Complaints About Coffee Shops** commonly found on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, as well as review platforms like Google and Yelp:

## 1. Customer Service Complaints

- **Unfriendly or rude staff:**

Customers often complain about baristas or staff being inattentive, dismissive, or having poor attitudes.

- Example: "The barista didn't even smile or greet me. Felt like I was bothering them."

- **Slow service during busy hours:**

Complaints about long wait times, especially during peak hours.

- Example: "Waited 20 minutes for a latte, and they weren't even busy!"

- **Wrong orders or mistakes:**

Common grievances include receiving incorrect drink orders or food items.

- Example: "I ordered oat milk but got regular milk, and I'm lactose intolerant."

## 2. Drink and Food Quality

- **Inconsistent drink quality:**

Customers notice variations in taste, temperature, or presentation between visits.

- Example: "My cappuccino was perfect last week, but today it's watery and bland."

- **Cold or improperly made drinks:**

Complaints about drinks being lukewarm or poorly prepared.

- Example: "My latte was barely warm, and the foam was non-existent."

- **Stale or overpriced food items:**

Customers complain about low-quality pastries or high prices not matching the value.

- Example: "The croissant was hard and tasted old, definitely not worth \$5."



### 3. Cleanliness and Maintenance

- **Dirty tables or restrooms:**

Complaints about unclean spaces or lack of staff attention to cleanliness.

- Example: "Every table was covered in crumbs, and the restroom was disgusting."

- **Sticky counters or floors:**

Customers often notice spills or messes not being cleaned promptly.

- Example: "The floor was sticky, and the counter had coffee stains everywhere."

### 4. Ambiance and Environment

- **Uncomfortable seating:**

Complaints about hard chairs, cramped layouts, or lack of seating options.

- Example: "The chairs were so uncomfortable, I couldn't stay to enjoy my coffee."

- **Loud music or noise:**

Customers complain about music being too loud or excessive noise making it hard to relax.

- Example: "The music was blasting; I couldn't even have a conversation."

- **Poor lighting or temperature control:**

Issues with harsh lighting, dim spaces, or uncomfortable temperatures.

- Example: "It was freezing inside, and the lights were too bright."

### 5. Pricing and Value

- **High prices for average quality:**

Customers often feel the prices don't match the quality of the drinks or food.

- Example: "I paid \$7 for a latte that tasted like something from a gas station."

- **Hidden charges:**

Complaints about extra charges for substitutions like alternative milk.

- Example: "Why am I paying \$1.50 extra for oat milk? That's ridiculous."

## 6. Availability and Accessibility

- **Sold-out items:**

Frequent complaints about popular menu items being unavailable.

- Example: “Every time I visit, they’re out of the pastries I like.”

- **Limited hours:**

Customers may find the café’s operating hours inconvenient.

- Example: “They close at 4 PM—too early for an evening coffee run.”

- **No Wi-Fi or charging ports:**

Customers expect amenities like free Wi-Fi and power outlets.

- Example: “No Wi-Fi in 2024? That’s a deal-breaker.”

## 7. Online Ordering and Pickup

- **Issues with mobile apps or online ordering:**

Complaints about technical glitches, delayed orders, or missing items in online pickups.

- Example: “I placed an order through the app, but it wasn’t ready when I arrived.”

- **Confusing pickup processes:**

Customers struggle with unclear instructions for order pickups.

- Example: “I had to ask three staff members before finding where to grab my order.”

## 8. Ethical and Environmental Concerns

- **Excessive use of single-use plastics:**

Complaints about non-sustainable packaging.

- Example: “Still using plastic straws and cups? It’s 2024, time to do better.”

- **Lack of local or ethical sourcing:**

Customers care about whether ingredients are sourced sustainably or locally.

- Example: “They don’t use Fair Trade coffee, which is disappointing.”

## 9. Lack of Personalization

- **Limited options for dietary needs:**

Complaints about few vegan, gluten-free, or allergy-friendly options.

- Example: “No dairy-free pastries, and all their drinks are overly sweet.”

- **Generic atmosphere:**

Customers want unique, Instagrammable spaces and offerings.

- Example: “This place feels like a copy-paste of every other café.”

## 10. Long-Term Issues

- **Declining quality over time:**

Customers complain when a café’s quality decreases after initial success.

- Example: “This place used to be amazing, but it’s gone downhill.”

- **Unclear loyalty program rewards:**

Complaints about confusing or unappealing loyalty systems.

- Example: “I’ve been a regular, but their loyalty program barely gives back.”

### Actionable Insights for Café Owners:

- Regularly monitor reviews and respond to complaints promptly.
- Conduct weekly quality checks and training to ensure consistency.
- Focus on creating a clean, inviting environment with clear policies for personalization and sustainability.
- Use customer feedback to improve online ordering systems and loyalty programs.



**MOST FREQUENT  
CHALLENGES  
BETWEEN  
CAFÉ OWNERS  
AND STAFF**

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## **Most Frequent Challenges Between Café Owners and Staff**

The relationship between café owners and staff is critical for smooth operations, but several challenges can arise. These are some of the most common issues:

### **1. Communication Gaps**

- **Symptoms:**

Misunderstandings about roles, responsibilities, or expectations.

- **Common Issues:**

- Inconsistent or unclear instructions from management.
- Lack of feedback channels for staff to voice concerns or ideas.

- **Examples:**

- “I wasn’t told we were introducing a new menu item until customers started ordering it.”
- “I don’t know who to ask when I need help during busy hours.”

- **Solutions:**

- Establish clear communication channels (e.g., team meetings, group chats).
- Use scheduling apps or shared calendars to provide updates and announcements.
- Conduct daily shift briefings to set expectations.

### **2. Scheduling Conflicts**

- **Symptoms:**

Disputes over shifts, inadequate coverage, or overburdened employees.

- **Common Issues:**

- Staff feeling overworked due to poor scheduling.
- Difficulty managing last-minute changes or absences.

- **Examples:**

- “I’m always scheduled for the closing shift, and it’s exhausting.”
- “We were understaffed during peak hours because no one adjusted the schedule.”

- **Solutions:**

- Use scheduling software (e.g., When I Work or Deputy) for fair and transparent planning.
- Rotate shift types to balance workloads (e.g., mornings, evenings, weekends).
- Have a backup plan or on-call staff for emergencies.



### 3. Inconsistent Training and Expectations

- **Symptoms:**

Variability in staff performance and customer service quality.

- **Common Issues:**

- New hires are thrown into roles without proper onboarding.
- Lack of ongoing training for long-term employees.

- **Examples:**

- “I wasn’t shown how to use the new POS system before my first shift.”
- “Some baristas follow one recipe while others do something entirely different.”

- **Solutions:**

- Implement a structured onboarding program with hands-on training.
- Provide a detailed employee handbook covering recipes, processes, and customer service expectations.
- Schedule quarterly training sessions to refresh skills and introduce updates.

### 4. Low Staff Morale

- **Symptoms:**

Staff show signs of burnout, lack of motivation, or resentment.

- **Common Issues:**

- Limited recognition for hard work or accomplishments.
- Lack of career growth opportunities.

- **Examples:**

- “I work long hours, and no one even says thank you.”
- “There’s no chance for promotion here; I’m just another barista.”

- **Solutions:**

- Offer incentives like performance bonuses or Employee of the Month awards.
- Create growth paths (e.g., lead barista, trainer, or shift supervisor roles).
- Regularly acknowledge achievements, even small ones.



## 5. High Staff Turnover

- **Symptoms:**

Difficulty retaining employees, constant hiring and training cycles.

- Common Issues:

- Poor working conditions (e.g., low pay, inflexible schedules).
- Lack of alignment with company culture.

- **Examples:**

- “I’m leaving because another café offers better pay and benefits.”
- “This place doesn’t feel like a team; it’s every person for themselves.”

- **Solutions:**

- Conduct exit interviews to understand why staff leave and address the root causes.
- Offer competitive pay and benefits, including paid time off or discounts.
- Foster a supportive team culture through team-building activities and regular check-ins.

## 6. Lack of Role Clarity

- **Symptoms:**

Staff are unclear about their responsibilities, leading to conflicts or inefficiencies.

- **Common Issues:**

- Overlapping duties or undefined roles.
- Staff feeling micromanaged or underutilized.

- **Examples:**

- “I’m supposed to be on register, but I’m constantly pulled to help in the kitchen.”
- “The manager steps in too often, even when I have things under control.”

- **Solutions:**

- Define and document specific roles and responsibilities for each position.
- Use task management systems to delegate and track assignments.
- Empower staff to take ownership of their roles without micromanagement.

## 7. Resistance to Change

- **Symptoms:**

Staff push back on new policies, technologies, or menu changes.

- **Common Issues:**

- Poor communication about why changes are necessary.
- Insufficient training on new systems or procedures.

- **Examples:**

- “We switched to a new POS system, and it’s so confusing without training.”
- “The new menu requires more steps, and it slows us down.”

- **Solutions:**

- Involve staff in decision-making to foster buy-in.
- Provide clear explanations and benefits of changes.
- Offer hands-on training and support during transitions.

## 8. Conflicts Among Staff

- **Symptoms:**

Tensions between coworkers disrupt team dynamics and customer service.

- **Common Issues:**

- Miscommunication or clashing personalities.
- Uneven distribution of tasks leading to resentment.

- **Examples:**

- “I’m always stuck cleaning while others hang out by the register.”
- “A coworker frequently criticizes my work without offering solutions.”

- **Solutions:**

- Set clear expectations for teamwork and task-sharing.
- Use team-building exercises to improve collaboration.
- Address conflicts immediately through mediation or private discussions.

## 9. Performance Issues

- **Symptoms:**

Inconsistent effort, missed shifts, or poor execution of tasks.

- **Common Issues:**

- Lack of accountability for underperformance.
- Failure to provide constructive feedback.

- **Examples:**

- “One barista doesn’t pull their weight, and it makes my job harder.”
- “I never know if I’m doing a good job because no one says anything.”

- **Solutions:**

- Implement regular performance reviews with actionable feedback.
- Address underperformance directly and set improvement plans.
- Recognize and reward high-performing employees to set a positive example.

## 10. Lack of Trust or Transparency

- **Symptoms:**

Staff feel uninformed or excluded from decision-making.

- **Common Issues:**

- Owners withhold information about business changes or policies.
- Staff feel their concerns aren’t taken seriously.

- **Examples:**

- “We didn’t know about the price increase until customers started complaining.”
- “The owner never listens to our suggestions.”

- **Solutions:**

- Hold monthly team meetings to discuss updates and gather input.
- Be transparent about changes affecting staff, like pricing or scheduling.
- Encourage open-door policies for feedback and concerns.

### Key Takeaways for Café Owners

- Strong communication, consistent training, and fair scheduling are critical to building trust and collaboration with your staff.
- Address conflicts and concerns early to maintain morale and minimize turnover.
- Foster a team-oriented culture through transparency, recognition, and growth opportunities.





# *Coffee* Academy

LET'S THINK  
OUTSIDE  
THE BOX

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