CHEF SERKAN BILIR · FREE GUIDE

9 Costly Restaurant Opening Mistakes

and the 5-minute cook interview

These are the mistakes I have seen cost the most money in the field, over 35 years and around 100 restaurant and hotel openings.

The 9 mistakes that lose the most money at an opening

1. Wrong staff selection
2. Staffing balance: staff walking out, too much overtime, no backup
3. Wrong equipment
4. Unnecessary pre-opening orders and stock mistakes
5. A menu with too many items
6. A kitchen system that is never set up
7. Waiters who do not know the menu
8. Uniforms that get lost and that nobody looks after
9. New staff put on the knife before they have felt the kitchen

Mistake 1: Staff selection

The right cook shows in the first 5 minutes of the interview. You measure reflex, not theory.

What you measure	Question or observation	A good answer
Calm under pressure	What do you do if an order is late at peak time, or a waiter makes a mistake?	Does not shout, does not throw plates, keeps the fire under control
Team spirit	Tell me about your past successes.	Puts the team first, not "I did it"
Practical reflex	The fridge temperature suddenly rises during service. What do you do?	Lists concrete steps
Cleanliness	Station, knife bag, nails, apron, shoes	Care is visible at first look
Speed	Trap question: which sport do you like?	Fast sports like football or running: fast and fits a team
Cost thinking	What do you do with product about to spoil? How do you use lamb or salmon bones and trim?	Cooks it straight away and uses it later, makes use of the waste
Recipe discipline	Loyalty to the standard recipe and the weights	Does not break the recipe in the name of "creativity"
Tempo	What kind of kitchen did you work in before?	12–14 hours standing, used to sudden waves of orders
Versatility	What do you do if the hot section gets stuck?	The cold-section cook also takes a pan

What you measure	Question or observation	A good answer
Handling mistakes	A plate comes back from the guest. Your first reaction?	Does not blame the waiter, fixes the mistake fast
Curiosity	What new thing did you learn in the last 6 months?	Still has passion for the trade
Mise en place	When is your prep finished?	"Never. It continues during service."
Working pattern	Can you work until 1 a.m., 6 days a week? How do you get home?	Gives a clear and realistic answer

Note: Asking about marital status is illegal in Europe and the USA. Get the same information with the working-pattern question.

When to hire: Ideally 2–3 months before opening. In the field, for money reasons, this usually drops to 45 days, sometimes to 1 week. That is where the real problem starts: in the first opening period, staff who do not like the job or the team leave.

This is one part of my guide on restaurant opening mistakes. If you are opening a restaurant or a new branch, or your kitchen is not working the way you want, the first meeting is free.

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