



# Speed of Service

*Respecting your guest's time*



Perhaps you have heard:

**Time is money.** – *Benjamin Franklin.*

**Time waits for no man.** – *Folklore.*

**Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend.** – *Theophrastus.*

**Lack of Punctuality is the thief of all time.** – *Oscar Wilde.*

When we invest our effort in someone else's comfort (**like quickly satisfying their hunger**), that person waiting has been **given more time** for their own life. Hmmm. Who doesn't want more time to do things they enjoy, like eating hot delicious food they just purchased?

**The most valuable thing a person has is time.** Time is irreplaceable. Once spent it is simply gone. Who wants to spend time WAITING for anything?? Well? Anyone? No? Yeah, me either. So...

**Why do so many food trucks have slow service times?** Some are clueless as to how fast or how slow they are moving. Like the cook on the cover we are doing 70 one-minute tasks an hour. We feel like guests are being served FAST but are they really? Recording times on tickets or using a POS system that does that automatically is **one key to faster service**. **Reviewing those times** per shift and per day is **a must**. Seeking to improve SOS is a path to loyal guests and more profit.

**Why do truck owners think saying “we cook to order” is an excuse to have painfully slow service?** “Cook to order” has its place in food service, however the public perception of food trucks is mixed concerning quality and speed. “Cook to order” food trucks create a non-congruent perception in guests. Typical train of thought is **“food truck = convenient”** and then logically **“convenient = fast”**. Then toss in “cook to order” and the guest's thought process is confused. **“Cook to order = slow”** Incongruent thoughts force the guest to reconsider the truck choice or order and endure the wait. Fast is relative per person based on **their needs in the moment of ordering**. At lunch folks are on some type of timer and can't wait on grandpa's “cook to order” food. However at dinner “cook to order” could be acceptable **if the taste and presentation reward the wait**.

**Why do many trucks still hand write tickets?** Clear communication with the cooks is a make-or-break step when developing a food truck operation model. Handwriting and hanging a ticket may seem like a speedy (and cheap) solution for clear communication. However, it requires **pre-printed and sequentially numbered tickets for speed and organization**. These tickets are expensive. The procedure also requires a readable and consistent shorthand that both cooks and cashier use on every single order. No matter how fast a person writes they will never be faster than pushing a button on a cash register that also sends the order to the kitchen. Plus physically placing a ticket on a ticket rail can be clumsy between cashier and kitchen often causing one employee to cross another employee's workstation. Steps to hang a ticket are **wasted time and energy**.

**Why do trucks think a line of 60 people for hours on end is brag worthy?** These truckers see **profit over service** and simply don't care about their guests. Which means they have customers. Often these braggarts leave out the "rest of story". Lines like this are usually associated with vending in large or special events, where guests are forced to eat within the venue and endure the wait if they want fed. These vendors are "one and done" never building a real business or loyal following. Basically their business simply is in the right place at the right time. They have not earned guest's loyalty. A faster line with similar food blows these guys away every time. People at events are there for the attractions of the event the NOT FOOD.

Each of those answers have the same underlying symptom. A lack of RESPECT for other people's time. Inexperienced food truckers equate long lines with more profit, not realizing long lines also drive away guests and cause more complaints. Both of which are **self-defeating for a real business**.

Many food trucks have no clue about SOS basics. **SOS stands for Speed of Service** and is measured from the point the guest joins our line (no matter how deep the line may be, the guest is **still at the mercy of the truck staff's ability**) to the time their food is presented. Fast Food restaurants (fast food is the closest analog to food trucks) refer to this as "line time". Fast food restaurants have spent billions in research on getting faster while delivering high quality food. **No need for us to re-invent the wheel**.

Ninety percent of food truck operators have **no formal food service training beyond cooking or serving**. Cooking a delicious meal for your family isn't difficult. Neither is working the counter at McDonalds, the kitchen at Wendy's or as

waitress at Olive Garden. However, **cooking/serving in volume takes training, talent and a well-practiced procedure** that is used by the full food truck team with each and every order regardless of how busy or how slow the truck may be.

Being a great short order cook, understanding anticipatory cooking, cooking in high volume, all take training and practice. **Lots of practice with feedback** on speed and quality. Plus **recommendations on getting faster and being more efficient.**

Fast and efficient is important to our guests. They have life, work, or playtime they want to get back to enjoying. Delicious food is a great respite from work at lunch time but most folks are on a timer to get **back to work and earn money** to pay for tomorrow's meal. (hopefully from us if we satisfy them today).

We have business goals, right? Well, **our guests have goals, too.** They want food. You know, they ARE hungry. I have a question for you –

**Have you ever dealt with a hungry baby?** Adults will morph into a baby if they



are forced to wait too long! No matter what we do, it will not be right. Those ads about turning into a diva when a person is hungry are right. Take a rational calm adult that is hungry and make them wait one second longer than they feel is necessary and we have a complaining guest that likely leaves a bad review that not only attacks the service but also attacks the food and anything else they notice. A

waiting guest has lots of time to notice everything they think is contributing to slow service or justifies their bad feelings towards our business.

Think about this. Vendors often force people to wait TWICE.

**Once to be able to place their order and then again to get their food.** Our goal must be to reduce **both times.** Of course, that is if we want to improve our **guest's perception of our business, earn loyal guests and grow our profit.**

## How do we respect our guests and their time?

A common mission for any food business is to **Serve high quality food by an engaged, attentive staff in a clean, sanitary environment with a commitment to building up our community** (both social media and civic).



I refer to this as **QSC<sup>2</sup>** - Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Community. Those four area are keys to success. Our focus here **is on Service.**

**Speedy service starts at the IDEA stage.** Commitment to **service excellence** starts at the beginning of our food truck dream. I strongly urge a written Operations Manual as part of the official business plan. An Operations Manual outlines the **exact procedures for guest service** as well as every other aspect of your business. During our planning stage we spend the majority of our time on recipes and costing out expenses. Every recipe also needs a specific serving and order procedure along with the traditional ingredient list and assembly directions. This makes us think about how something is ordered, possibilities for modifications and how to communicate to the kitchen in a manner that helps the cooks go FAST. Once in the kitchen the cooking and assembly procedure must be defined with product standards AND time goals. A logical floor plan is only **efficient if the stations are also laid out with speed in mind.**

**Imitation is the best form of flattery.** It is also a **short cut to achieving our profit goals.** Success leaves clues and there is no reason to re-invent the wheel with so many examples of SOS success out there. The NUMBER 1 fast food (again, fast food is the closest analog to food trucking) chain in per unit sales is ~~McDonalds~~ nope **Chick-fil-A.** Coming in at a whopping 4.5 MILLION per unit annual sales and **open only 6 days a week,** Chick-fil-A has been above the 4 million mark since 2016. No other chain of **comparable size or larger** has EVER crossed 4 MILLION per unit average. Sales is one thing but what about speed?

Chick-fil-A breaks the **SOS measurement methodology** as every independent company tracking SOS times has to explain Chick-fil-A's drive thru lanes often have

**ten or more cars in line** compared to all the other companies having only a paltry three or four cars on average. Chick-fil-A embraces technology and uses employees with tablets in the DT lanes getting the orders to the kitchen faster than waiting for the drivers to pull up to the speaker. Chick-fil-A averages moving a car every 32 seconds, however their total line time is 3:20. Their line time is slow because the line is LONGER. While the next best SOS per car time is Wendy's, is averaging 57 seconds. Since they are lower volume (1.6 million per unit) in sales their lines are shorter giving them a line time of 2:51. Even though the time is longer Chick-fil-A FEELS faster because your car is MOVING every 32 seconds, at Wendy's it is nearly a full minute between movements. It FEELS SLOWER.

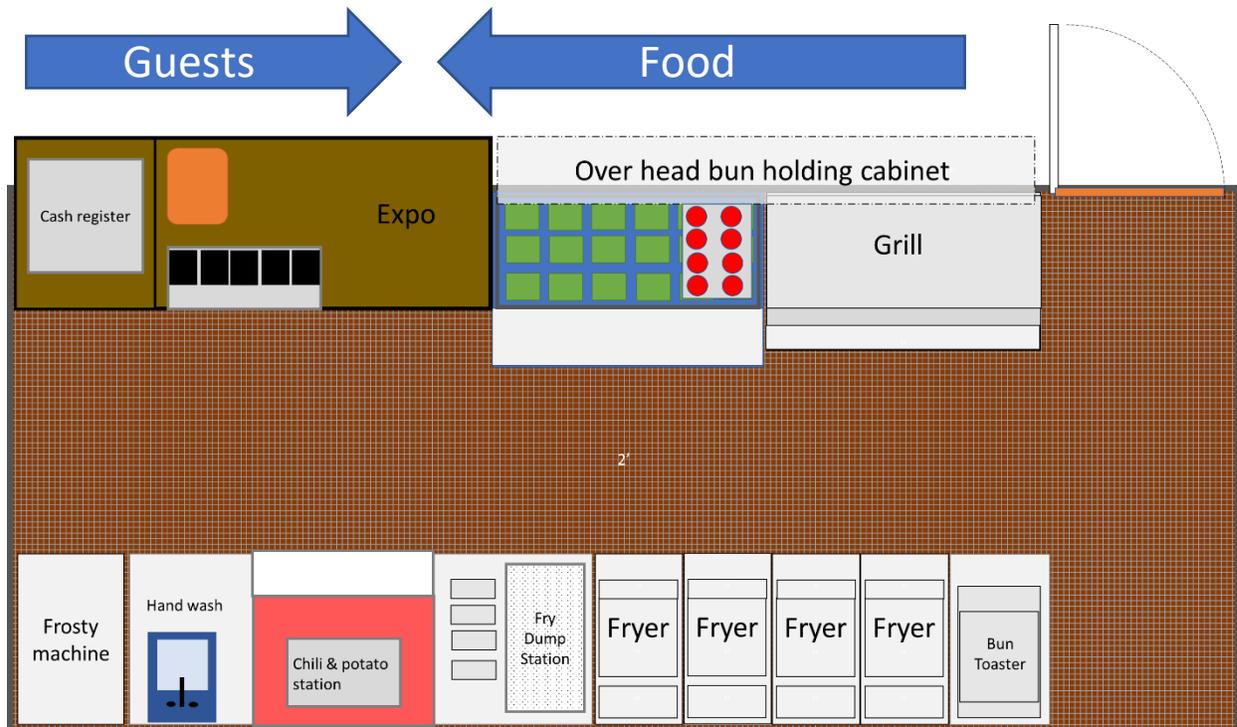
We all want Chick-fil-A level sales, but we can't start at the top. **What can be imitated by a food truck?** Chick-fil-a is the example for extraordinary guest service in making guests feel welcome while providing fast service and a delicious consistent product. BUT most food trucks don't sell a product with an hour hold time. We are going to take Chick-fil-A's attention to training and execution in dealing with guests and combine it with Wendy's fresh food cooking approach.

**Creating an organized kitchen procedure.** Our food truck must be built for speed and so should our menu. A newbie often adds on foods just because they can cook it with existing equipment. They believe bigger menu means bigger sales and more profit. **IT DOES NOT.** A bigger menu means slow order times (guests have to read it, then decide), more waste and more inventory short falls from lack of storage space. Keep your menu to 4 core items. Wendy's original menu had burgers, fries, chili, soda and Frostys. Chili was an outlet for pre-cooked hamburger patties that exceeded their hold time. Frostys are the dessert option. Simple menu. The KISS (keep it simple, stupid) method at its finest.

Do you remember Burger King adding chili, tacos, English Muffins and baked potatoes all at the same time? This a part of a ridiculous plan known as "Take away the 'no' vote". The thought process was if BK offered all these different foods a family or group would never face a person voting "No" to eating at BK because a certain food was not offered. Never mind the plethora of foods still not served by BK. Each product was dropped within six months with no improvement in sales and a massive increase in food cost.

~KISS~

Here is the kitchen layout (frontline only) from the 80's (after baked potatoes) for a Wendy's:



Notice anything? Drop 2 fryers, add a 3-compartment sink, a little more refrigeration and we have a food truck! The footprint is 8 X 18. So easily fitting inside a food truck. The drive thru area at Wendy's had its own grill, sandwich station, Frosty machine and register area. Effectively two fully staffed mini restaurants sharing the fryers.

**Note the flow of food** and the movement of the guest. After placing the order the guests moves towards the expo position, while the food is also moving towards the expo position. Everything each crew member needs to produce food is in front of them. No spinning around, no clumsy reaching around other workers to pick up something.

If you are thinking your local Wendy's is slow and not worthy of imitation you could be right. The downfall of Wendy's has been a **lack of focus on Basics**. The exact same thing Chick-fil-A exceeds. And...

**Organization, exact procedures and accountability are a must.** The problem with corporations is once the founder is removed, retires or sells out the company loses its original excitement, drive and attention to detail the **founder learned as they grew the business.** That is why new up and coming concepts (like Five Guys) scare the older corporations and the new guys grow so fast. How many of the new concept's menus or procedures eventually get copied by the older bigger corporations? A prime example is baked potatoes. Wendy's is recognized as the first chain to be successful with a baked potato in the mid-80s. Yet they were a full year behind the real originator of topped baked potatoes in fast food. Both company's home offices were in Columbus, Ohio and at the time only a few blocks apart. That small regional company got the attention of a big corporation and was **imitated by the larger company.** The same thing we want to do. **Imitation of the best executed better.**

**Dave Thomas was a burger restaurant genius.** He developed a system that was so fast some franchise owners could not comprehend how efficient it really was. Sadly, this system is no longer in use because everyone at the corporate level thinks they know how to improve a system without really understanding the system they want to replace. Once millions of dollars are spent on remodels the restaurant is stuck trying to make the best of a bad, poorly tested system. **That part we won't copy.**

I used to be a franchise business manager for Wendy's. That is the guy that **annoys franchise owners** by making sure they are following Wendy's Operations Manual for cooking and guest service procedures. I would be the guy that stands outside with a stopwatch timing the drive thru or sitting in the dining room timing the inside line.

When I visited Ocala, Fl the store on State Route 40 right off I-75 they achieved 21 second drive thru and a blazingly fast TWELVE second dine in time. Thinking it was a fluke or someone tipped them off that I was around and they over-staffed the restaurant to pass, I made a surprise return inspection the following week, leaving St Pete and driving to Ocala just to see if they were really that good.

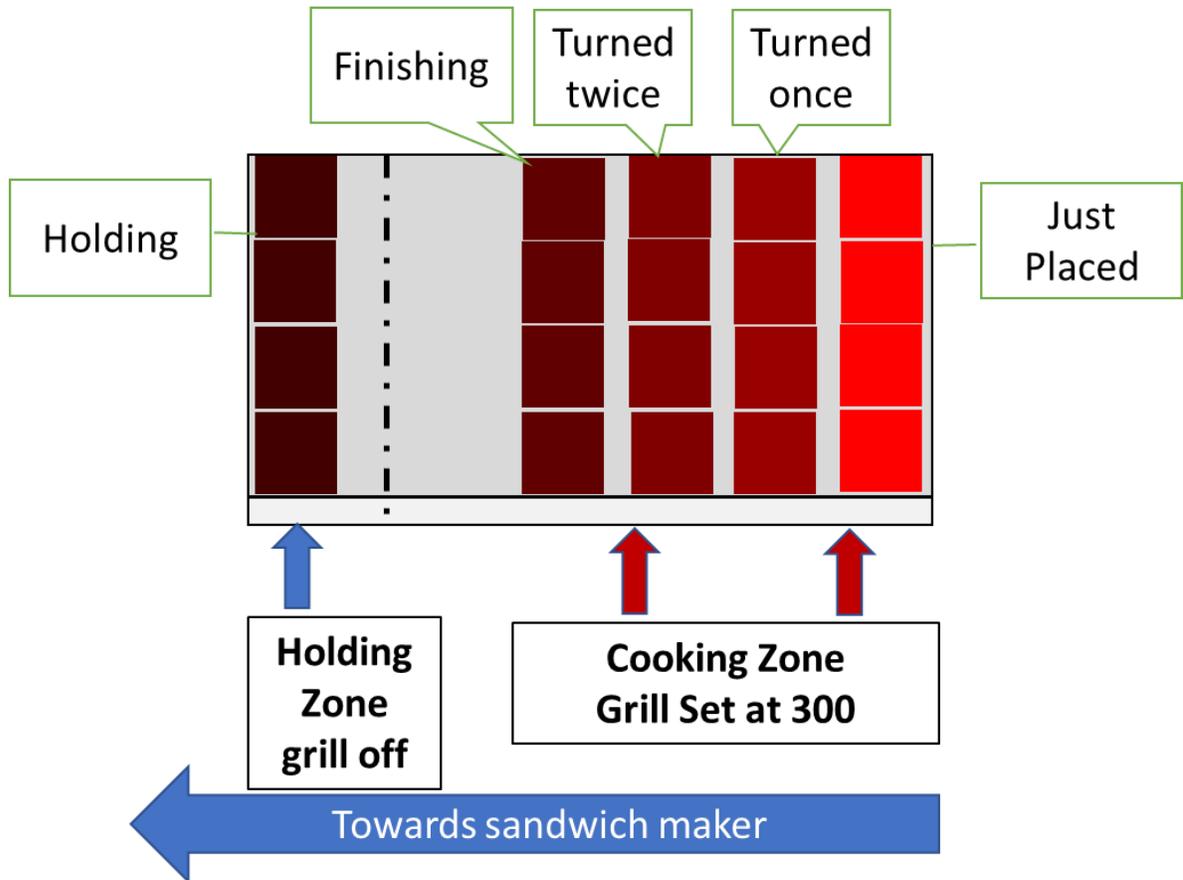
Just to put this in perspective it was the early 90's long before modern KDS (kitchen display system) or fancy two-way headsets, **everything was done verbally** over a speaker as the guest ordered it. The staff DID NOT depend on the register tickets to make orders, only to verify orders as they passed them out.

I walked through the door right after a group of businessmen. I heard the cashier call out over the kitchen speaker “five guests in the door, 12 left to order”. Exactly what a well-trained cashier should do. This information allowed the grill and fry stations to make sure they had enough food cooking to accommodate the line. Yes, **food already cooking with a reasonable chance of selling**. Management would provide training with standards of how much or how little food to cook per guest in line. Starting to see how a small menu works? Focused cooking.

In the serpentine que was the salad bar attendant. Wendy’s trained the salad bar person how to take orders in the line using a **preprinted order pad**. They were trained a certain way to mark the orders. Once the order was written the attendant would hand the ticket to the guest and tell them to present it to the cashier when it was their turn to order. This procedure saved the 20 second blank stare at the menu board that guests often do when it becomes their turn to order. This is also why the old Wendy’s layout had a FULL menu board in the serpentine line plus one behind the cashier. The attendant would move through the line taking orders until either all guest orders were taken or 3 to 4 minutes had lapsed. Remember their primary job was to keep the salad bar filled. If the line were longer **and they needed to stock the bar**, the attendant would leave the line and stock the bar. Once the bar was fully stocked they would then return to write orders if needed. The training point for starting this procedure was if the line in front of the cashier exceeded 4 people. The attendant would start order taking with the third person in line.

As a guest with ticket in hand approached, the cashier still greeted them (this salutation while seemingly just a pleasantry actually **paces the line** buying the kitchen much needed breathing room from the constant barrage of orders even if it was only 5 seconds) while offering their hand to get the paper ticket from the guest.

Then they would **make sure the sandwich maker was ready to listen**. If not the cashier would make small talk for a few seconds until the sandwich maker was ready. Once ready they called out the order, **starting with burgers**. This allowed the grill operator to replace whatever was ordered. The grill person likely had several rows of meat in differing states of doneness like this:



As you can see, that is 20 patties cooking at different times. (I worked at Wendy's long enough to cook thousand patties with this method) Remember they sell Singles, Doubles and Triples so that is not a lot of total sandwiches cooking.

The cashier would say:

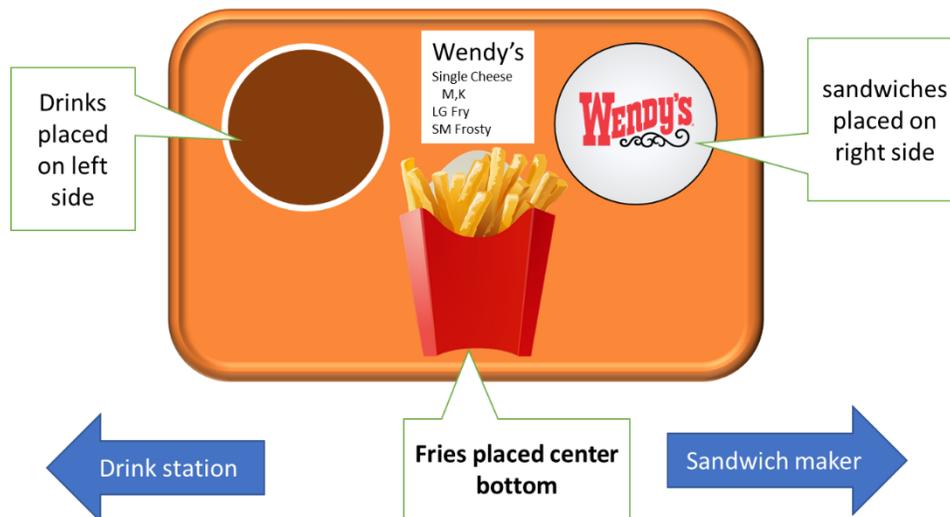
“**Order in** (signaling to the crew to pay attention) Single Cheese Mayo, Ketchup only (another signal that condiment application was complete), Large fry (allowing the fry person to make sure enough where cooking), small frosty.”

The team actions with this order would be:

**Grill person** places a new meat patty and putting cheese on a wet spot on the grill to melt then placing it on a patty in the holding zone. Next placing the single patty with cheese on the heel of the bun the sandwich maker had already laid on the cutting board.

**Sandwich person** pulls a wrap, places it on the cutting board, pulls a pre toasted bun (which is held in a steam cabinet on low) places the heel on the wrap and holds the bun in his hand awaiting the cashier call. This is the signal the cashier was looking for. As the cashier calls the condiments the sandwich makers applies them. Training of the cashier is so important for this to work. The cashier **ONLY** calls out the **condiments in the proper order they are applied**. So mayo followed by ketchup. Saying “only” alerts the sandwich maker to stop applying condiments and tells the grill operator **NOT** to apply mustard (which is his job applying it directly on the cheese or meat when ordered).

**Fry person** scoops up a Large fry and places it under the heat lamps until the sandwich and drinks are on the tray. Once the sandwiches are placed, the fry person places the fries on the tray or in the bag for to go orders. Details are important, even food placement on trays has a trainable procedure:



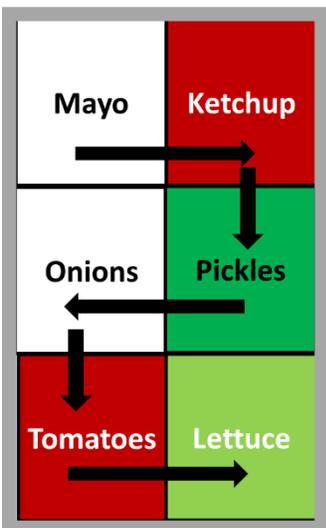
**The cashier**, after collecting the money (and discarding the handwritten ticket) would make the Frosty, as the machine used to be directly behind the front cashier. This action breaks up the constant barrage of calling orders in to the cooks, still shows remaining guests the team is hustling. If all goes properly all the elements hit the tray at the same time.

The team doing exactly what the Wendy's training taught them, moved that line of 12 people plus the next 18 that joined the line later in ten minutes and four seconds. (I remember that time as it reads “10-4” which is a popular response from CBers and TV police shows, yes I remember weird things)

**This is just over 20 seconds per guest.** Not the twelve second time from my first visit but still a full 10 seconds under the service standard for dine-in.

There is a lot of **training and execution** to get orders out in thirty seconds. For example, the application of condiments is white, red, green, white, red, green. Mayo (white) applied by spatula the EXACT size of the bun. One swipe, bun covered. (takes practice), Ketchup (red) applied by teaspoon using the back of the bowl to spread in a circular motion. If done gently enough the mayo is not even disturbed. Pickles (green) applied by hand counting 4 placing them in a square pattern not overlapping each other. Onions (white again) 4 perfect rings spaced evenly on the crown. Tomato (red again) Wendy's used beef steak tomatoes that if cut properly would only take one to cover the crown. Finally topped with lettuce (green again) that had been torn by hand during prep to the size of the bun.

The cashiers were required to call the condiments out in this EXACT order. The condiments were also laid out on the station in the same order.



Notice the flow. It starts out farther away from you and brings you closer with each condiment. Smart.

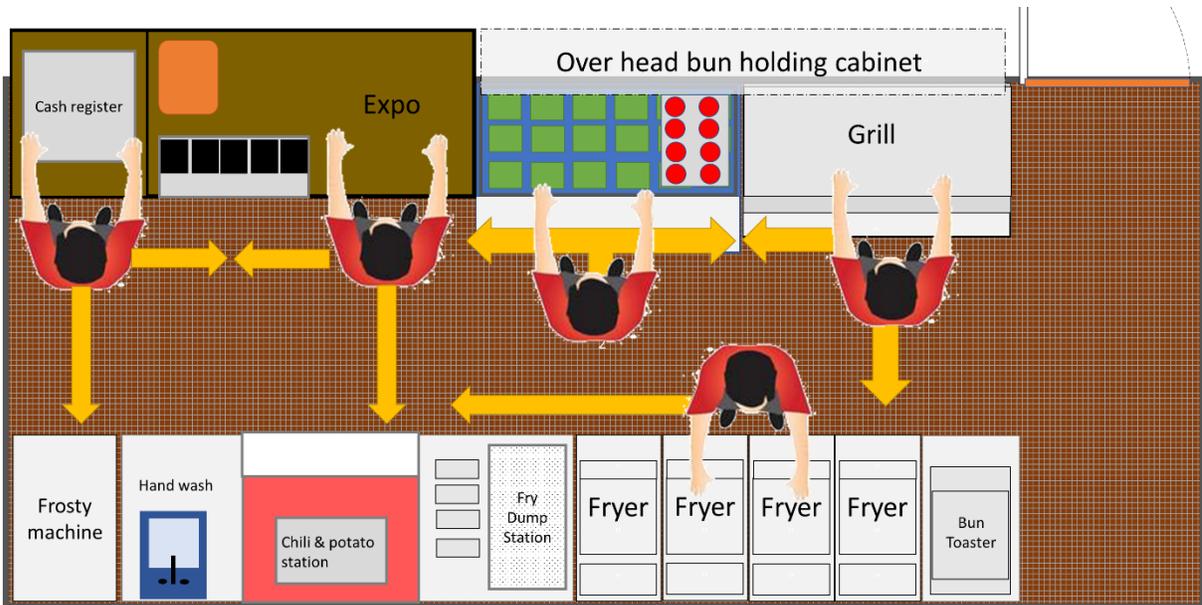
You would be surprised how many ways there are to slow down SOS by **not thinking about every single detail** just on the condiment application and the setup of the sandwich station.

That condiment application order and the verbal calling of those condiments becomes a make or break for SOS. If an order is “single, cheese, mayo, pickle, onion, tomato, only” the sandwich maker can skip over the ketchup with confidence knowing the cashier is calling condiments in **the exact order they are applied**. No need to refer to a screen, no need to refer to a ticket. It also sets a time goal for the sandwich maker to apply the condiments as fast as they are called out.

You may have noticed Mustard does not fit the white, red, green training. Mustard was added by the grill person on the top of the patty after placing it on the bun heel. If cheese was added the grill person added the mustard on top of the cheese. Making the grill person in charge of placing YELLOW condiments.

Here is what lunch staffing would look like with their movements shown:

## SPEED OF SERVICE



Notice no one is crossing over another position. **The food moves NOT the staff.**

Each employee avatar is positioned at the primary position. The arrows represent secondary tasks and movements during service. **Notice they don't cross over each other.** This setup was a typical staffing level for the front-line expecting sales of \$600.00 per hour. In today's money that would be \$1218.00 per hour.

Employee training included what was called **"bump and slide"**. Each position had a pre-determined second position to move into (slide) as sales slowed and some staff started cleaning up and re-stocking tasks. The first employee either sent home or to clean up was the fry person. The grill person then took over (bumping the fry person offline) just dropping baskets of fries while also maintaining the grill. The Expo then pull the fries as the timers went off, salted the fries and portioned them as needed. As things slowed more the Expo was next to leave. Leaving the sandwich maker to place items on trays, thank the guest and also handling the salting and portioning of fries. The grill operator would assist with sandwich assembly if the sandwich maker were dealing with a guest.

The restaurant had a minimum staff level of 3. Front cashier, Drive thru cashier and Grill. Obviously, the sales would be exceptionally low to drop down to that number of staff but little mini rushes are commonplace. Those folks had to know how to do everything and had to back each other up. Slow SOS is not excused by a shorthanded staff. Those **guests deserve the same speed** as the guest coming at noon with a full staff on duty.

Given today's street food burger pricing that set up with 5 employee easily handles \$2000 MINIMUM per hour. More if using an outside the truck order taker. (like the salad bar attendant in Wendy's) The problem will be food truck storage. A nice problem to have.

The typical staff of three in the average food truck should handle \$800 to \$1000 per hour without any difficulty. If and that is a big IF, the truck is organized, the procedures are efficient and the staff highly motivated and productive. SOS is always limited to the slowest person on staff. The owner must be able to recognize the bottleneck, decide if it is a **procedure issue or a productivity issue** and then either RETRAIN or REPLACE.

Here is where some food truckers will start debating. Some trucks already pull those numbers. The question is are they **maxing the productivity of their staff** and making the **max sales the truck can produce per hour**.

**Guest count is a metric that can be compared truck to truck.** (even then the menu difficulty is a consideration) So on a twenty dollar check average that \$1000 dollar hour is only 50 guests. If our training and procedures will handle one guest per minute there is a short fall from capacity of 10 guests per hour. Or \$200 dollars in sales and possible a loss in profit of \$100. Room for improvement. **Never rest on your laurels.**

The last Wendy's franchise I ran was the 5<sup>th</sup> highest volume in the world at the time. Even with all those sales we still had tons of room to improve operationally. We worked every day to improve SOS to feed even more people each hour. Even with those high sales we never, ever reached our **cooking capacity**.

I mentioned fryer capacity but what about **grill capacity?** A grill has only so much cooking space and needs a short recovery time between runs. You may have noticed from the diagram of Wendy's grill the cap was 25 meat patties at one time (on a four-foot grill). Let's say the cooking time was 5 minutes. Let's also give a 30 second recovery time and 30 seconds to place the next 25 patties. That is 6 minutes total. Meaning our **grill could cook a total of 250 patties an hour.** (60 minutes in an hour divided by 6-minute run time and that result is multiplied by 25 patties per run.) In round sales at a \$10 burger price that is \$2500 per hour. See the point? **An organized kitchen with organized cooking procedures will likely be able to produce more food they we could reasonably be able to sell or store.**

Make the patty a third pound size that is popular today. Even with a 10-minute cook time that is still 5 runs an hour or 125 patties. A third size burger is averaging \$15.00

So the grill is contributing a possible \$1875 an hour. If we don't get the full use out of our equipment we need to figure out why. **Is it a marketing issue, a training issue, an organization issue, a bottleneck elsewhere on the truck?**

Next we have to see if our fryer matches the possible output. Typically a fast-food order of fries is 6.2 ounces. Meaning our 40 pound per hour fryer can produce 103 orders per hour. (That is also perfection in portioning) Hmmm...

If our marketing is able to bring enough guests to max the grill and we attempt to serve 125 people an hour there is a reasonable chance we fall behind on fries by 22 portions or start giving smaller portions or worse attempt to shorten the cook time. **Those are all problems.** Those short cuts damage quality and discourage repeat visits.

What about cashier speed? **A reasonable guest interaction is 30 seconds per order** inclusive of greeting to the cash transaction, (another reason to have a small menu) but could be over a minute on larger orders. If we average that to 45 seconds, the most orders a cashier could take is 80 an hour. Fixes the fryer issue but leaves us with a grill that is not fully utilized. We could start with a smaller grill and save the propane usage. OR figure out how to increase the speed of the order taking process by adding a second cashier or in line order taker. Either way it is up the owners to fix potential SOS issues in the planning stages. **Design layout for high sales and develop scalable service procedures that can grow into high sales.**

A properly operating Wendy's in the 1980s had the potential for 120 cars in the drive thru plus another 120 in the front. **It is an exceedingly rare thing to fire on all cylinders long enough to achieve 240 guests in one hour.** The most I've seen is a little over 200 (and that is a rarity). In truck world that would still be a \$4000 dollar HOUR. Most folks I know would be thrilled with an eighth of that per hour. (\$500)

## Bottom Line

All these thought processes **must happen in the dream and planning stages.** Once we commit money to equipment it is too late. Certainly **once we open it is way too late.**

Respect your guests by giving faster service than your part time food truck hobbyist competitors. Then **strive to be faster today than you were yesterday.** After all **you invited them to your business.** (your marketing, signs and food aromas are all invitations)

If you are already open and operating, have someone time your speed of service. All they need to do is count the number of guests in line BUT not count the one that is in the middle of placing an order. Once that second person in line steps up to the cashier start the timer and allow it to run until the last person counted has received their food. Once the last person has received their food stop the watch and divide the time by the number of guests in line. SOS is going to differ for every menu, the time goal must be fast enough to satisfy your guest's time needs and your food must satisfy their hunger. Falling short of either goal hurts your bank account.

How often are your guests are moving towards the cashier? **Anything over one minute is too slow for lunch crowds.** If the line moves every minute or less, you're psychologically rewarding the guest. Each step forward is **building anticipation of delicious food**, the smells wafting from the truck helps reinforce the decision to patronize your business. The guest thinks, "hey this line is moving fast, I can't wait to taste that food it smells amazing!" BUT slow service crushes that anticipation and turns the thought process to "What is taking so long? I should have went somewhere else."



## Uncommon Courtesy



Speed is half of the SERVICE equation and actually the easiest to teach and practice. The harder other half is more difficult to master as we all have a tolerance level that once breached turns us into raving lunatics.

Courtesy is behavior that is taught from an early age. Unlike training someone to dress a burger in certain order which is often a new skill set, courtesy or lack thereof, unfortunately, may have to be unlearned.

Take Chick-fil-A's catch phrase. When a guest says, "thank you" the employee responds with "My Pleasure" rather than the more common "you're welcome". "My pleasure" tells the guest "It makes me happy to help you". We all like making other people happy. Food vendors do it with their food. "My pleasure" allows the guest to 'feel' good about the happiness they just spread. People get addicted to an endorphin rush associated with good feelings. Don't believe me? How does it really make you feel when someone "likes" your Facebook posts? (If you thought to yourself "I don't really care." Just stop reading and DO NOT get into the food business. Your cynical personality will lead to a ton of personal frustration in this business, no reason to put yourself through that.) How about the token badge of accomplishment when you reach the next level of a video game? Those rewards become addicting almost 'forcing' you to return and seek more meaningless tokens. We might as well take advantage of endorphin addiction.

**Understand that Great Guest Service is a Continuous Learning Process.** Set the example and teach your staff. Speak to your team the EXACT way you want them to handle your guests. Rudeness "off stage" behind the scenes teaches your team rudeness is allowed "on stage" with your guests. Gutter language in private will slip out in public.

**Show Your Customers Your Work Ethic.** Remember hustling? Showing a sense of urgency shows the guest we are working hard to take of their needs. Work ethic also means keeping non-work-related chatter out of the truck. Guests that "interrupt" a personal conversation to place an order remember that **momentary negative feeling** (perhaps subconsciously) and may allow it to influence their

opinion of everything that follows. If you ever said, “if they had just paid attention they would have gotten my order right”?

**You Need to Have Thick Skin** and NEVER take comments or reviews personally. Address issues and never respond to opinions. A professional response to a negative review lessens the impact for the next person that reads that review. Don't get caught up in perfect five-star ratings. Any savvy potential guest will look at a perfect score and recognize it as utterly fake. An occasional poor review validates the raving reviews. No one is perfect so stop trying to act like your business is.

**Pay Attention to Your Customer's Experience.** Is the food coming out fast enough? Is the sandwich neat and presentable? Portions correct? Temperature hot or cold enough? Is the team working like a team? Are the guest interactions friendly and courteous?

**Practice Active Listening.** You and your team are going to disappoint someone at some time. When faced with a complaint think L.A.S.T. (LISTEN – APOLOGIZE – SATISFY – THANK). Pay attention to what is being said. A complaint is your guest actually saying, “I like your business and I want you to do better in the future so you will stay in business”. The guest is likely upset and not rational or calm but every complaint has a basis a fact that is important to that particular guest. You do not have to judge a complainer simply satisfy them to return tomorrow with friends. Every person you chase away to satisfy your hurt ego is really ten or more people that become walking negative advertisements. Admit your mistakes and correct them.

**Create a Guest Community.** Engage your guests learn their names. Tag them on social media, encourage photos of your food and have them tag you. Social media is important. Make collecting guest feedback easy by encouraging reviews and comments. Plan on responding to EVERY comment in a unique way. Form letter responses come across as insincere.

**Don't Use Negative Language.** Every time you say “NO!” to a guest you are saying “NO!” to your bank account. If you have a “no additions or substitutions” you look petty. Don't debate me on how it slows things down. **It does not.** Rather than saying “no” attach a price to the addition or substitution. That way the guest can decide if the change is worth the price or not. Use positive language in your interactions. A guest says, “can you drop the onions and tomatoes and add bacon in its place?” responding “NO!” is just rude because obviously the change is within your ability, you just don't want to. Simply respond, “Of course we can. There will

be a \$2.00 charge for the bacon.” Now the guest can decide on paying the price or not.

**Always Close Guest Interactions Properly.** “Please” and “thank you” and “come back and see us” or “My pleasure”. These will set you far above most teenagers working for your competition.

**Surprise Customers with a Thank You.** A repeat guest deserves a surprise reward of a free side or drink, even the whole meal. Tag them online unexpectedly with a special offer just for them AND a friend. This way you get to impress a new guest.

**Teach your Staff Guest Service is Everyone’s Job.** From the shy cook to the retiree that cleans your truck after hours. Even if they never interact with guests their PERFORMANCE and RESULTS do. Teach them the importance of their job and how it impacts the guests, the business and ultimately them.

**SMILE.** Hospitality begins with the first impression. Before a single word is ever spoken body language and a smile set the tone for the encounter. A resting grumpy face should not be the face of your company. Smiles are contagious, share yours with your staff. Set the example, ALWAYS.

**Develop a set of rules** on how you and your team must always act when “on the clock”. These rules are only as effective as your example and enforcement. Training is a never “one and done” activity. No world class athlete trains only once and then expects to win every day, neither should you.

Team Member Mantra:

- I project a positive image and energy.
- I stay on task and help my teammates whenever I can.
- I am courteous and respectful to all guests including children.
- I go above and beyond our guest expectations.

**Leadership basics for you and any other supervisors.** Develop a set of rules for management (including the owner) on how they must always act. Their mantra:

- I lead with a positive attitude and demonstrate commitment to my staff’s success.
- I know & lead my operation and teach it to my staff.
- I lead by example and hold my staff accountable for delivering exceptional guest service as laid out in our Operations Manual.

## Improve your SOS.

- **Thin down your menu to 3 or 4 core items** and 1 or 2 sides with a small drink selection. You can't be all things to all people **so stop trying**. Core means different proteins. A hot dog is one (then limit listed variations), hamburgers is two (again limit variations), A Philly Cheesesteak is three and Chicken is four. Stop! Nothing else. You will actually **sell more food** by having a lean, easy to understand menu built for speed and **you will make more profit**. Also limit your condiment selections to no more than SEVEN to TEN. Every choice increases ordering time. With those FOUR core items you may have bacon added to the burgers so a logical additional menu item is a BLT, Chicken Bacon Club or a Bacon Wrapped Hot Dog. The core proteins remain at FOUR but you have the ability to make the menu look larger without adding more food ingredients. Ingredients **MUST** pull double or triple duty.
- **Take a hard look at your current layout.** As much as possible the **food should only move in one direction** and that is toward the guest. The staff should NOT move, **only the food**. Every back-and-forth motion wastes time and adds fatigue. Examine every condiment or topping and how it is held and where it is held. Ask the tough questions, looking at flow of sandwich assembly. Eliminate back and forth motions here, too. **Even if it is only inches. Change it.** Remove excessive condiment choices. Save their time and your money.
- **Write a specific job description for each team member INCLUDING YOURSELF.** Your staff needs to know their primary responsibility as well as a second and even a third responsibility. They need to know what to do when sales are ramping up towards a meal period (as in how much to precook) and what to do as things wind down to clean up and restock for the next rush. Your staff will also **need to know your role and how you will support them** in achieving the SOS goal you will set.
- **Write a teamwork system** like the “bump and slide” system mentioned earlier. This helps not only when you send an employee off the line to do something like get more ice or food but it helps the team **handle those days when you are short-handed.**
- **Write the exact procedure of every step of the guest experience** and the team's method of handling those guests WITH time goals. Talk about the greeting, the way to ring the orders or write them, how to communicate to the cooks, how to properly mark the order. The cooks need to know how much food should be cooking at any given time, the exact sandwich build in portions and in order of assembly. The key is to either anticipate cooking like

Wendy's or cook ahead and hold like Chick-fil-A. Either way the amount of food **MUST** be based on historical sales. The only time to guess is when you start your business and then guess **LOW**. The specs for holding times **MUST** account for quality. **NEVER EVER** sell a sub quality product just because your over projected. Create a procedure on how to bag an order for neatness, not crushing other foods or setting them on their side creating a mess for the guests. What to say when presenting the food to the guest and how to invite them back is another often-forgotten procedure.

- **Cross train everyone.** **DO NOT ASSUME** someone claiming food experience from a chain restaurant actually knows anything. Likewise claiming food truck or short order cooking experience does not mean anything. Train them as if they have **ZERO** experience because they do. They have zero experience in doing things **YOUR** way and **YOUR WAY** is the only one that matters. New food truck owners make the mistake of hiring “experienced” folks and allowing them to do things like their previous employer. Having a staff consisting of an x-McDonalds’ cashier, an x-Waffle House cook and an x-mom and pop diner server without training them on **YOUR** procedures is a recipe for **SOS** disaster.
- **Create job aids.** Visual aids for product assembly give your staff a goal for presentation as well as proper portion control. **NEVER** think condiments are cheap and don't impact your bottom, they do. Use prep lists with specific amounts and time goals. Another thing Wendy's did in the 80's was **EVERY** task had a time goal. For example, processing a case of for sandwiches was listed at 22 minutes per case. If we had 3 cases to do that was 66 minutes.

You are the leader of your business. **Everything good in your business is result of your planning, training and execution**, everything bad is a result of your (lack of) planning, (lack of) training and (indifferent) execution. Train your people and then **inspect what you expect**. Training is not a “one and done” exercise. It takes constant **communication with feedback** to build a cohesive and guest-centric team. **Never stop improving QSC<sup>2</sup>**, your bank account will thank you.



## Commercial ahead!

**If you are anti-capitalism please don't read the next page...**

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