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Portfolio #4

I've worked as a hostess in Benihana, a Japanese hibachi steakhouse, for about a year and four months. The restaurant got a lot of business, however, I believe there are a lot of changes that need to be made. Employees are overworked in Benihana almost everyday due to the managers overbooking the restaurant, which has caused customers to not have a good experience and have a violent outburst to the employees. Employees do not feel safe there and often times call out for this issue, which only adds on more workload for the workers that do show up. Due to all those factors, I finally gave my resignation last summer.

When I worked in Benihana, the time slot for every half hour was supposed to have at least sixty people according to the general manager. On an average night there were four to five hundred people coming in, and that's just reservations. Walk-ins would get an average of an hour and a half to two-hour wait time for a table. Some nights it went up to three and on the really busy ones, we couldn't even give a wait time because it could exceed the three hours so we had to tell customers that, even though clearly we shouldn't have accepted walk-ins, at least in my opinion along with the other workers. During the month of December, I remember every night had about 800 reservations. We were so overbooked that my co-workers and I didn't even have time to take a break to eat, or even use the bathroom. The fact that the manager accepted walk-ins caused the restaurant to stay open later.

Because we were so overbooked, my former co-workers and I were under a lot of pressure. Everyone was so stressed out that they couldn't even fake a smile for

the customers. I remember my sister telling me that every time she went to eat there the employees looked miserable. When I read reviews on yelp, most people complained about their experience starting with the wait time, then it lead to the bad service when they were finally sat.

Some nights the wait for a table was so long that even reservations had to wait up to an hour. Of course anyone with a reservation for a seat a restaurant would be furious if they were told they had to wait for their table, so there were times where the other hostess and I got verbally attacked. Some people threw things at us, such as, the buzzers we give out to locate our customers when their seat is ready. We got threats from multiple guest. When we called for a manager and told them the situation, almost every time, they took approximately around five minutes to come downstairs. The person was either gone by then or the manager would calm them down and end up sitting them sooner. Yes, after customers disrespected employees they would get rewarded earlier seating, only in Benihana.

Due to the chaos, hostesses regularly called out on the busiest days, Fridays and Saturdays, which were normally the only days I worked because I had school during the weekdays. There were five host scheduled for the average night, two out of three would call out, causing me and the other hostess to do double the work, as in check in customers, organize the seating which was not easy for a big restaurant with several server groups, and pack orders for take out and delivery. Seating was upstairs so we had to run up and down to get people. Some nights I stayed hours longer than I was supposed to because we were so booked, I knew the other hostesses wouldn't be able to handle everything by themselves. The hostesses that

call out, however, never got in trouble or any sort of warning, instead the pattern repeated.

When I gave in my resignation, I told my manager that I no longer felt safe there. I've been verbally attacked by customers almost every night and overworked, yet nothing was done about it, not even any appreciation for the nights I stayed longer every week. My managers didn't have much to say, besides apologizing for the way I felt. When I went back a month later, I went with two of my former co-workers who left for the same reason I did. We spoke out once again about why we left along with solutions we believe can fix the problems for everyone else. First, we insisted that they stop overbooking the restaurant and explained how it only resulted in customers having a bad experience. This caused people to feel unsafe which was why the call out rate was really high. We recommended that they enforce a policy to limit the number of times workers call out and also hire a security guard so that they feel safer. The managers listened to what we had to say, however, I don't think they took us seriously. We were just given a lecture about the business and an apology for how we felt once again.

Surprisingly, later that week, I heard two other hostesses quit. Two weeks after hearing about the other hostesses, I got a call from one of the managers I spoke with a month back. He asked me if I can come back and work there and told me about all the chaos that was happening; some nights they were down to one hostess. The new hostesses they hired didn't know how to run the floor and there was no one to train them well. He even offered to pay more. I felt bad for how everything was going but I already had another job where I was comfortable in, so I denied his

offer. I found out that night that the other two hostesses that quit got the same call and offer, but they also denied him.

Although the place was a mess in my opinion, Benihana was still a good learning experience. The place taught me not to take things too personal, build up my patience, and over all I think I gave me thick skin. I'm glad that eventually what I said got to the managers and I do wish the best for them.