

English Language Training:  
**A KEY INGREDIENT  
FOR FOODSERVICE  
PRODUCTIVITY**

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Chapter 1:

# **THE LEP WORKFORCE IN THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY**

## The LEP Workforce in the Foodservice Industry

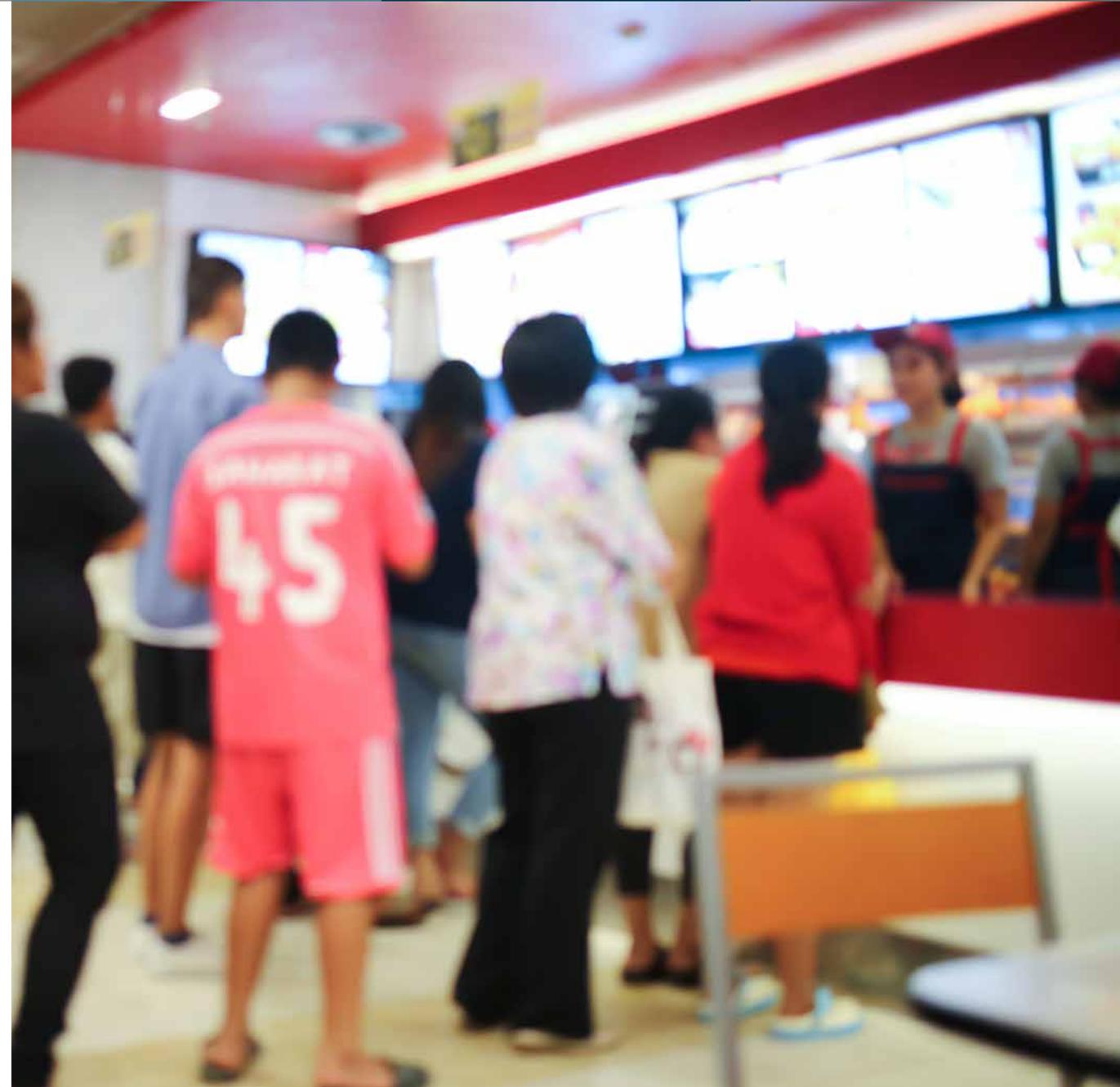
The retail foodservice industry is a mainstay of American life. The 2017 Restaurant Industry Pocket Factbook found that almost half of consumers say that “restaurants are an essential part of their lifestyle,” with 90 percent revealing that “they enjoy going to restaurants.”<sup>1</sup>

The strength and importance of the restaurant industry cannot be overemphasized. There are more than one million restaurants across the country. Sales in 2017 are expected to hit \$799 billion—making up four percent of the gross domestic product of the U.S. economy.<sup>2</sup>

It should come as no surprise then that the restaurant industry is also one of the largest employers, providing jobs for 14.7 million people. Put another way: 1 in 10 American workers keep this vital sector humming.<sup>3</sup>

The need for restaurant workers shows no signs of slowing down. Analysts predict that over the next decade, an additional 1.6 million jobs will be created.<sup>4</sup>

But the workforce is shifting significantly. Many of these jobs will be filled by foreign-born employees and their immigrant children. In fact, the restaurant industry already leads the economy in this regard. “Restaurants have a higher concentration of foreign-born workers than the overall U.S. economy. More than 23 percent of



## The LEP Workforce in the Foodservice Industry

individuals employed at restaurants are foreign-born, versus 18.5 percent for the overall economy,” according to the National Restaurant Association.<sup>5</sup>

Foreign-born workers hold down jobs in practically every part of retail foodservice as cooks, waiters, bussers, dishwashers, kitchen staff, food prep staff, frontline food workers, service and maintenance workers, hosts and hostesses. Indeed, the National Restaurant Association found that “a full 43 percent of restaurant chefs are foreign-born.”<sup>6</sup>

An even more dramatic example of the crucial role that foreign-born workers play in the restaurant industry can be seen in the Day Without Immigrants in February 2017. The industry came to a standstill. Many restaurant owners across the country simply closed their doors for the day, while others drastically cut back their service—undeniable proof of the importance of foreign-born workers in retail foodservice.

There is no question that some of these foreign-born workers are undocumented. Precise numbers are hard to come by for obvious reasons, but a 2009 report from the Pew Research Center may shed some light. The report found that “unauthorized immigrants also are overrepresented as a share of food preparation workers and servers (12 percent)....They are also 28 percent of dishwashers....”<sup>7</sup>

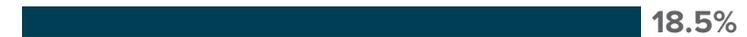
Since the report was issued, those figures have likely risen. But even if they remained flat, they still reveal a staggering truth that hurts profits of foodservice restaurants: Many of these foreign-born workers and their children possess limited proficiency in English, referred to as LEP.

### EMPLOYED FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS

Restaurant sector



Overall U.S. economy



They lack basic English communication skills, putting themselves and fellow foodservice workers at risk. Instead of comprehending all the aspects of their tasks properly, many foreign-born workers come up with their own cheat sheets or other coping instruments to hold onto their jobs and hide their deficiencies from their managers.<sup>8</sup>

This situation puts unnecessary legal and financial pressures on the foodservice industry. For example:

A Massachusetts family is suing Panera Bread after their six-year-old daughter suffered a violent reaction and had to be hospitalized after eating a grilled cheese sandwich containing peanut butter—despite warnings from the parents about their child’s peanut allergy when they placed the order. According to the Boston Globe, the manager of the Panera Bread franchise outlet “blamed the incident on a ‘language’ issue....conceivably [by] an employee with limited English.” Less than one month later, a different family experienced a similar incident at another Panera Bread location.<sup>9</sup>

## The LEP Workforce in the Foodservice Industry

In fact, the pressing need for LEP solutions in the foodservice industry is underlined by consequences such as:



- **High churn rates among employees:** According to the National Restaurant Association, “the turnover rate in the hospitality sector topped 70 percent for the second consecutive year” in 2016.<sup>10</sup>



- **Increased safety risks:** SafetySkills, a safety training company, found that “Hispanic and Latino workers have the highest workplace fatality rate of any group, nearly 50 percent higher than the overall rate....largely attributed to language barriers....”<sup>11</sup>



- **Lower earning power:** A Brookings Institute study discovered that LEP workers earned 17 percent to 135 percent less than workers proficient in English.<sup>12</sup>

For the foodservice industry to exist—let alone thrive—in the coming decade, a workforce that can speak, read, write, and understand English proficiently is essential. It is a problem that no foodservice owner or manager can afford to ignore any longer.

To that end, this ebook will explore these problems in detail, assess obstacles, review benefits, and provide sensible cost-effective strategies for setting up on-site comprehensive language training that rewards foodservice owners, managers, fellow workers, and the foreign-born workforce itself.

Chapter 2:  
**THE HIDDEN COSTS  
OF AN LEP WORKFORCE**

## The Hidden Costs of an LEP Workforce



**A** retail foodservice outlet is a complex operation made up of many moving parts.

Customers must be greeted cordially, orders taken accurately, food prepared properly and served promptly, the premises cleaned and maintained regularly, and problems resolved satisfactorily.

The competence with which the foodservice staff handles each function every time a customer walks through the door determines whether that customer will return or spend their dollars elsewhere.

Underlying every element of the operation is the ability of staff and managers to communicate clearly. Without that capability, everything else is at risk.

### OBSTACLES TO EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY

Retail foodservice outlets with an LEP workforce are stretching their luck. It's only a matter of time before a link in the chain breaks, hindering the success of the outlet.

LEP workers present a number of problems for foodservice managers and owners, including:

- **Harder retention.** According to the National Restaurant Association, “27 percent of restaurant operators said recruiting and retaining employees is the single most important factor facing their business.”<sup>13</sup>

- **High risk of litigation.** LEP workers with an inadequate grasp of safety or food prep protocols open restaurants and foodservice outlets to a higher incidence of lawsuits. A Chili's Grill & Bar In Charlotte, North Carolina, was cited by the county health department when an employee was unable to explain proper healthy policy,<sup>14</sup> while a man brought suit against an Oregon steakhouse after going into anaphylactic shock after his food order was prepared incorrectly.<sup>15</sup>
- **Poor social skills.** A report by the Society for Human Resource Management found that workers applying for jobs in the foodservice sector “lacked workplace soft skills such as problem-solving, interpersonal skills, communication, teamwork, and leadership.”<sup>16</sup>
- **Jeopardizing other employees.** LEP workers who don't have a clear comprehension of evolving safety guidelines, store policies, and job protocols put fellow employees at a higher risk for injury.
- **Increased safety risk to themselves.** Trends show a disturbing rise in problems for LEP workers. A 2016 report from the Food Chain Workers Alliance and Solidarity Research Cooperative found that “non-fatal rates of injury and illness in food production jumped from 4.6 cases per hundred workers in 2010 to 5.5 in 2014.”<sup>17</sup>
- **Major impediment to food safety.** One report estimates that “59 percent of the foodborne illnesses originate from retail foodservice establishments.”<sup>18</sup> LEP workers only compound the problem.
- **Limited employee advancement.** Without sufficient English language

## The Hidden Costs of an LEP Workforce

skills, LEP workers may be more likely to leave their employers—disrupting operations and long-term planning. A 2017 report from the National Skills Coalition found that “lack of opportunity for advancement can affect workers’ decisions about whether to stay in the sector over the long term.”<sup>19</sup>

- **Undermined customer service.** Workers, especially frontline employees, must be adept at resolving customer disputes with finesse. An LEP worker with poor language skills will be unable to fully grasp a customer’s complaint, take care of it properly, and retain that customer.
- **More downtime.** LEP workers who lack the comprehension skills for carrying out the foodservice outlet’s guidelines are more likely to make mistakes—requiring more time on the part of fellow employees and managers to correct them.

As compelling as these problems are, the question remains: Why should employers in the foodservice industry care and pay attention to them?

Each of these problems chips away at the productivity and profitability of a foodservice outlet. Unless managers and operators address them with strategic proactive solutions before they have a chance to fester, the future of these establishments is dim.



27% OF RESTAURANT OPERATORS SAID RECRUITING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES IS THE **SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR** FACING THEIR BUSINESS.

SOURCE: NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

As we’ve seen, LEP workers are tasked with a variety of functions that are essential to running and maintaining a food service outlet. Without improved language skills, those establishments risk their livelihood.

In analyzing LEP staff in the workplace, the National Skills Coalition reported:

“Their skill gaps carry heavy consequences for themselves, their co-workers, their employers, and our society as a whole....This issue functions as an invisible drag on productivity and worker mobility.”<sup>20</sup>

The problem is clear. But LEP workers who want to improve their English language skills on their own face daunting challenges, too.

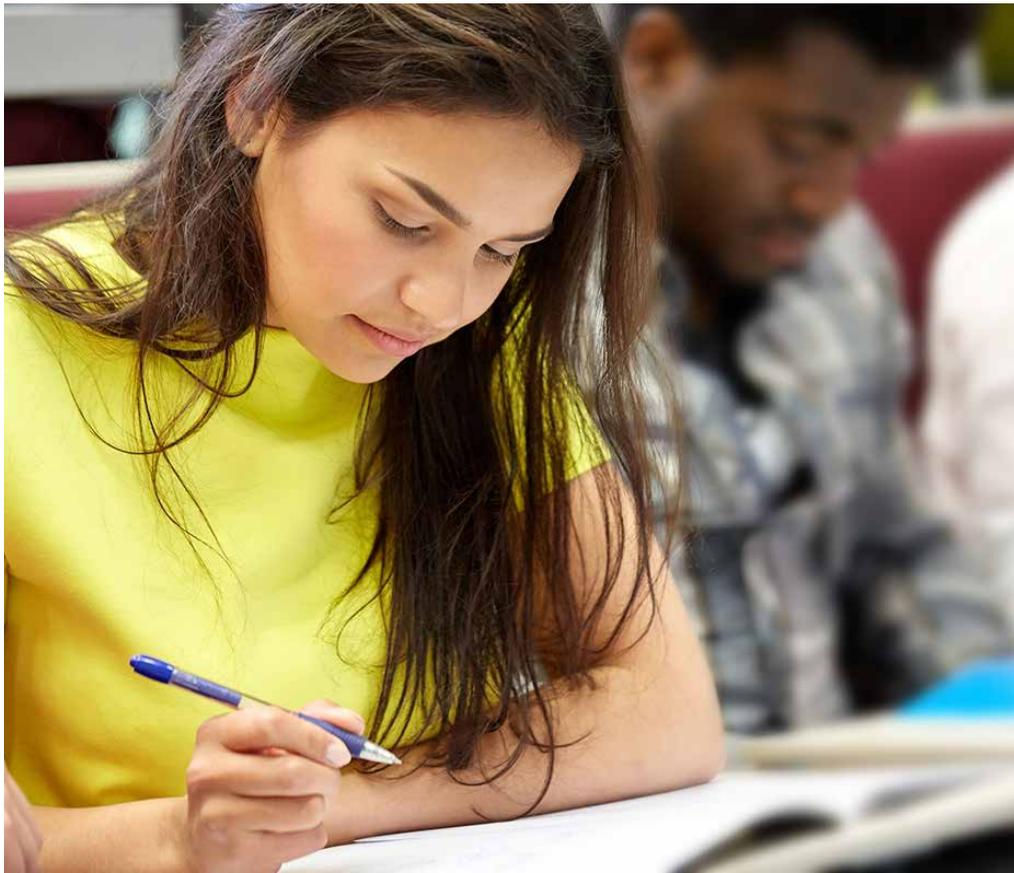
Chapter 3:

# **LOGISTICAL OBSTACLES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING**

## Logistical Obstacles to English Language Training

**A**n ESL workforce is here to stay. And it consists of not just the workers themselves, but their children as well.

The foodservice industry seems particularly affected by this trend. According to the National Restaurant Association, “The restaurant industry has the youngest workforce out of any sector in the economy.”<sup>21</sup>



The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that four in 10 restaurant workers are in the 16-to-24-year-old age group.<sup>22</sup> While some of these younger workers may be more proficient in English than their parents, others surely lack necessary communication skills for the workplace.

Given this sobering reality, the future prosperity of foodservice operators is on the line. The choice is clear: It is in their own best interests to address the problem of LEP workers now or risk an escalating series of financial, safety, regulatory, and labor problems.

What about LEP workers themselves? What responsibility do they have to remedy the situation on their own? It is their life and their career. They should take charge of their own progress. Why should it fall upon managers and owners of foodservice operations to close this skills gap?

It is true that many LEP workers do indeed want to improve their English language skills and try to make a dedicated effort to do so on their own.

However, looking at the situation realistically, the odds of LEP workers overcoming their challenges without employer-sponsored support are small indeed.

### LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES STYMIED

The National Skills Coalition reports that “31 percent of workers said they would have liked to participate (or participate more) in learning opportunities over the past year, but had not been able to.”<sup>23</sup>

## Logistical Obstacles to English Language Training

Let's take a look at some common and often insurmountable hurdles that this LEP population faces:

- **Lack of financial resources.** The unpredictability of income earned by LEP workers in the foodservice sector and scant monetary assets create a major impediment. An analysis by the National Skills Coalition found that a whopping 84 percent of service sector workers enrolled in formal degree or certificate programs received no financial support from their employers.<sup>24</sup>
- **Lack of time.** LEP workers are squeezed for time, perhaps more than other classes of workers. Child care and family responsibilities consume a big chunk of whatever “free” time workers have, according to the National Skills Coalition.<sup>25</sup>
- **Inconveniently scheduled programs.** The time and location of adult education classes were often incompatible with the work schedules of LEP workers, according to a Brookings Institution report.<sup>26</sup>
- **Long waiting lists.** Adult education classes historically have had lengthy waiting lists for registration, but the situation seems to have gotten worse. For example, Los Angeles had a waiting list of 16,000 people for adult education classes in 2016, “especially the English as a Second Language programs...”

Adult education courses certainly provide a laudatory way for LEP workers to improve their skills, but they're not a perfect solution. These classes often come with their own issues.

An article on EdSurge, an online resource that covers the intersection of education and technology, found that some adult education courses may be hampered by:

- Inconsistent program quality

84%

SERVICE SECTOR WORKERS ENROLLED IN FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS RECEIVED **NO FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THEIR EMPLOYERS**

- Less perseverance from learners
- Unsatisfying outcomes and progress
- Disparity in the type and quality of training
- Instructors with varying degrees of expertise
- Out-of-date instruction methods and materials<sup>28</sup>

Taken together, these factors paint a frustrating picture:

On the one hand, there's an LEP workforce who possess the interest, drive, and dedication to improve their language skills in order to become more valuable assets to their foodservice employers.

On the other hand, these same LEP workers are hindered in their efforts to improve by time and money constraints, family and work responsibilities, and inconvenient class schedules.

LEP workers can't do it alone. They need the help of their foodservice employers. But if owners and managers step up to the plate, what do they get out of it?

Chapter 4:

# **EMPLOYER BENEFITS OF ON-SITE LANGUAGE TRAINING**

## Employer Benefits of On-Site Language Training

**T**he challenges to LEP workers who want to improve their English language communication skills are integral to how foodservice outlets function today.

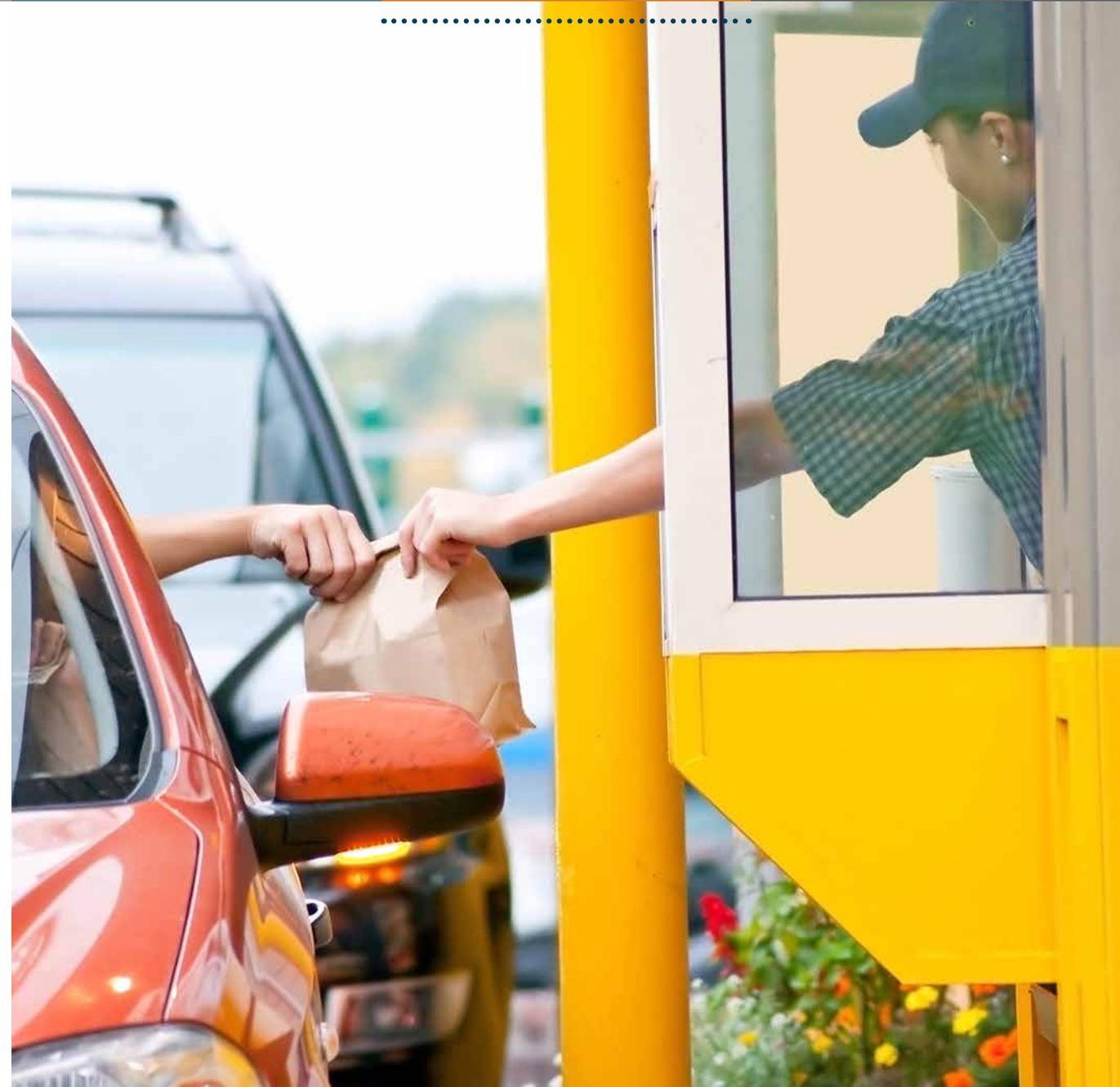
Despite their keen desire to advance, the obstacles of learning on their own make it inefficient and impractical. The answer lies with the active support of their employers. In the foodservice industry, that means the owners and managers.

To ensure the future prosperity of their establishments, it is incumbent upon them to help provide on-site language learning for their LEP workforce.

Now, some might argue that owners and managers would be assuming all the risk and getting few guaranteed rewards. After all, they would have to invest time and money to make an on-site language program work—with no promise of a commensurate return on investment.

On the contrary, foodservice operators would gain substantial advantages across their businesses and beyond.

Data from the National Skills Coalition found that “skill gaps among U.S. service sector workers are a significant challenge that often prevents people from achieving their full potential. Unlocking this potential will benefit



## Employer Benefits of On-Site Language Training

individual workers as well as the businesses that employ them and the wider U.S. economy.”<sup>29</sup>

For example, McDonald’s launched an on-site language training program for its LEP workers called English Under the Arches. Time and space were set aside at franchises during the workday for workers to log onto a website and receive instruction from an English teacher over the phone.

Results have been impressive, with a 91 percent graduation rate and “84 percent of participants going up at least one level on an English-proficiency assessment. McDonald’s also estimates that 95 percent of employees who graduate from the program increase their wages.”<sup>30</sup>

### PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR FOODSERVICE OUTLETS

Managers and operators who offer on-site language training will gain key advantages, such as:

- Higher retention rates. LEP workers will be more loyal to employers who invest in their advancement. Giving them on-site language training shows employers’ commitment to them, ensuring lower turnover.
- Customized training. Managers will be in charge of designing their own on-site language training program, determining the kind of content—such as job-specific language comprehension—that they want their LEP workers to learn.
- Skillful customer assistance. As “82 percent of food chain workers are in frontline positions,”<sup>31</sup> LEP workers with a competent command of English can provide better customer service and ensure a higher rate of returning customers.

### MCDONALD’S ON-SITE LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM

Graduation rate



Advanced at least one English-proficiency level



Employees who got wage increases



- Lower risk of accidents. As a report in the Journal of Extension makes clear: “...it is expected that food handling behaviors will improve due to improved knowledge and result in safe food handling practices thus reducing the incidence of foodborne illness.”<sup>32</sup>
- Fill problem positions faster. Employers will be able to find employees for hard-to-fill roles once they’ve been trained in a custom content program and experienced employers’ commitment to them. A survey by the Society For Human Resource Management found that “the approach HR professionals consider most effective is to train existing employees to take on hard-to-fill roles...”<sup>33</sup>

## Employer Benefits of On-Site Language Training

- Attract new hires easier. On-site language instruction is an effective recruiting strategy. Potential employees will be more likely to work for an outlet that supports language training, letting owners choose from a larger pool of qualified workers.
- Hire internally. Training an outlet's existing workforce in the way that managers prefer allows them to promote from within their company—cutting down on churn rates, lowering HR costs, and maintaining a skilled, stable workforce.

Workers who possess English language competency will assimilate into society, spend their dollars, and add to the national economy—a win for everyone. A McGraw-Hill report that measured the impact of an educated and trained U.S. workforce found benefits that included:

- Increased tax revenues
- Greater business productivity
- Increased consumption
- Increased workforce flexibility
- Decreased reliance on government financial support<sup>34</sup>

There is no doubt that choosing, setting up, running, and administering an on-site language program will incur some upfront costs of time, money, and company resources.

But the return on investment for foodservice operators will be evident in higher profitability, productivity, growth, and stability.

So where should foodservice managers and owners begin?

Chapter 5:

# **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ON-SITE LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS**

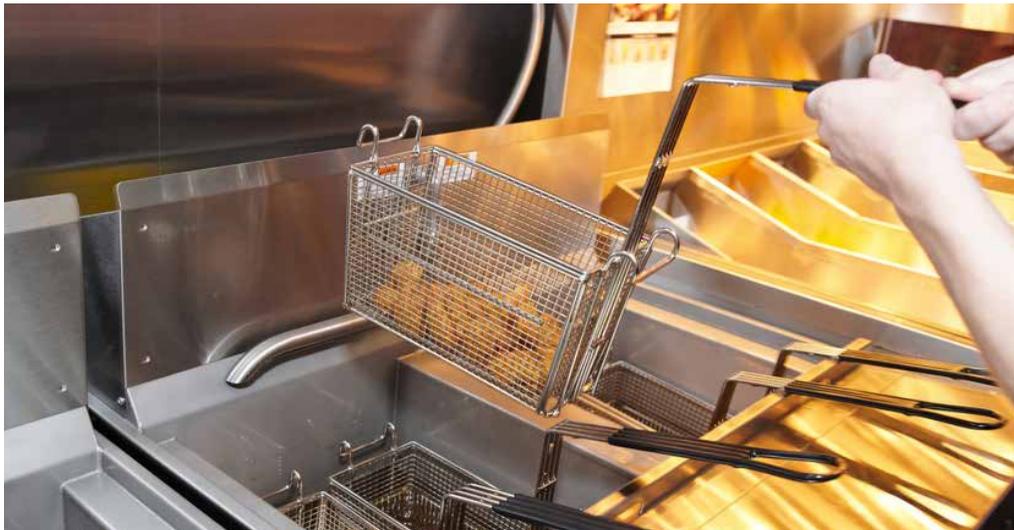
## What You Need to Know About On-Site Language Training Programs

**R**etail foodservice operators are starting to address the LEP problem with proactive solutions.

As the McDonald's English Under The Arches program shows, an on-site language training program is an efficient, cost-effective way to break down barriers and deliver measurable value to LEP workers and the foodservice outlet itself.

Rosetta Stone provides language training tools that can be accessed anytime and anywhere—giving foodservice managers and operators control over training that does not disrupt their normal schedules. Custom training exercises and instruction can be tied to the specific needs and competencies of individual employees. Workers learn at the level that they're comfortable with, ensuring steady progress.

Mobile apps allow LEP workers to practice their language skills without having



to sit in front of a desktop computer ... giving workers more freedom to practice their lessons conveniently for a richer, time-saving learning experience.

In addition to working with easy-to-navigate technology, LEP workers will also be able to connect with live tutors and speak directly to them to supplement and speed up their instruction.

How does this translate into practical terms? Consider the following examples.

### OPENING THE DOORWAY TO ADVANCEMENT

In 2016, The Wendy's Company piloted a Rosetta Stone® program to make English as a Second Language (ESL) training available to interested company employees.

Juan Cortez-Diaz, a manager at a Wendy's restaurant in Countryside, Illinois, encouraged his employees to participate. He knew, for instance, that Maria Diaz and Cecilia Contreras wanted to improve their English proficiency so they would be more comfortable in customer-facing positions at the restaurant, like at the front register.

They were excited to have the opportunity to sharpen their language skills and volunteered to be participants in this pilot program.

Using the Rosetta Stone mobile app, they completed lessons on their smartphones and studied during their breaks.

Cortez-Diaz reports that their English proficiency jumped significantly, boosting their confidence levels. Now they look forward to talking with the customers and even request to work the register.

## What You Need to Know About On-Site Language Training Programs

As Cortez-Diaz says:

“Employees at all levels could really benefit from this program. I know a manager who aspires to grow her career at Wendy’s, but feels like her language skills are holding her back. I’ve told her to look into the ESL Rosetta Stone program because I know it will give her the confidence to achieve her dreams and reach that next level.”<sup>35</sup>

### HELPING EMPLOYEES DEVELOP CONTINUOUSLY

One of the core values of the Panda Restaurant Group is inspiring its associates and employees to grow on an ongoing basis. Making it possible for them to become proficient in their English language skills is a key part of the company culture.

“There are so many barriers in careers as is. We don’t believe language should be one of them,” says Alvin Tang, learning and development coordinator at Panda.

To that end, Panda began offering Rosetta Stone’s online-based software to its workforce. Employees could access the program through their email accounts using their device of choice—home computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

Tang created a Facebook group that celebrates the achievements of learners, posts messages of encouragement, and champions super users. Learners are eligible to win prizes based on their participation in the language program, with more than 10 new employees recognized every month.

Tang reports that language training has led to a decrease in employee turnover by as much as 19 percent, cutting Panda’s training and rehiring costs.

“At first we saw Rosetta Stone as a supplemental learning option,” Tang says. “But now, with the help of our client managers who really understand Panda’s culture and structure and the different types of positions, they’ve helped us identify opportunities to further utilize Rosetta Stone to lift up the performance of our operation.”<sup>36</sup>

### TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Foodservice managers who have lingering doubts about investing in on-site language training should consider this:

By 2027, over one million new jobs are expected to be added to the restaurant industry.<sup>37</sup>

According to the National Restaurant Association, “All of this means that foreign-born employees will be increasingly important to the restaurant industry’s ability to expand and create jobs in the years ahead.”<sup>38</sup>

For foodservice operators and managers who want to plan for their future now, the question is obvious: What’s the best way to address these issues?

Rosetta Stone can provide some answers.

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[Click here](#) to learn more about Rosetta Stone’s programs for business or to to schedule a consultation.  
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## Endnotes

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