

SECURITY IN A FOODSERVICE FACILITY: PROTECTING YOUR ASSETS

Consider the number of people that have access, at one point or another, to your kitchen facility. Kitchen staff. Servers. Purveyors. Service agents. While it would be great to assume that everyone has your best interests in mind, such a thought process would be naïve. Unfortunately, some members of the parties listed above have their own interests in mind. It is your responsibility to make sure that your interests are protected.

Security is a critical issue in foodservice facilities. There is a significant amount of money tied up in assets that are extremely desirable by others. Steak, lobster, and other expensive foods should be viewed as assets. It is no different than tires at a tire store or clothing in a department store. Hospitality employees do not typically view the food in the walk-ins or dry storage rooms in this manner. As a result, they don't feel as guilty about taking something. "No one will miss this" they convince themselves. I know because I have seen it happen time and time again during my operation days.

Protect Your Assets

There are steps that you can take to protect your investment. Keep in mind that where there is a will, there is a way. In other words, anyone with a strong desire to steal will find a way to do so. Utilizing some of the preventative measures discussed below, however, may act as a deterrent and limit your exposure to theft.

The location of the office is critical. The best location will be dependent on the layout and configuration of the kitchen space, but there are some rules to follow that will help you determine the appropriate location. The office should have easy access or clear views of the back door. Most products that "leave" the facility do so through the back door. If the office is in close proximity to the door, would-be thieves might think twice about trying to sneak product by the manager's office.

Be sure that the office has clear sight lines of as many work areas as possible. Truthfully, a manager shouldn't spend much time in their office. While they are there, however, they should be able to see what the staff is up to, or at least leave them with the feeling that they are being watched.

The kitchen should be designed to limit the number of alcoves and enclosed spaces. Such configurations make it too easy, not to mention tempting, for would-be thieves to plan and act on their malicious intentions. Open spaces, easily viewed from the main kitchen area or office should be incorporated. Also, the use of half walls instead of full walls in certain locations will assist in the effort as well.

Valuable items, such as liquor, should be held under lock and key. Just as important as securing these items is limiting the number of people that have access to such product. The fewer the better. This may sound like common sense, but separate securable areas are often overlooked in the planning phase. On opening day, the manager asks where the liquor is to be kept and then learns it will be stored on the floor in the manager's office. It is tough to control your inventory when it is stored below your desk.

One issue that is overlooked time and time again is the fact that purveyors (soda, beer, food, etc.) often have unsupervised access to your kitchen facility. Once again, temptation and opportunity often leads to mysterious "loss of product." In my design work, I try to provide separate, isolated storage of and access to purveyor provided products. For example, a beer keg walk-in cooler should be separate from the walk-in coolers and freezers. Why should a purveyor be permitted to meander through the walk-in cooler, where your lobsters and steak are located? Provide a dedicated keg cooler with a single entrance, and make sure that the entrance is easily supervised. This philosophy can be used for other purveyor provided products.

Although not a design related issue, the relationship between management or ownership and the staff is vital. I worked for a great restaurant manager early in my career ... he really knew his stuff. One day, a bus boy asked for a dessert to

eat and the manager obliged without hesitation. He then explained that it is better to be open and honest with your staff. Had he turned down the request, the dessert would have likely been taken anyway. Not to say that this is acceptable behavior on a regular basis, but it is a method to consider every now and then.

Implementation of the design techniques above will not guarantee the elimination of theft from your facility. They will, however, provide significant deterrents to those that are considering stealing. If it is difficult to steal, it may not be worth their effort. The end result is better protection of your assets ... yes assets.