

Restaurant Church Makeover

Many of you have probably seen the restaurant makeover shows where a celebrity chef – like Gordon Ramsay or Jamie Oliver – go into a failing restaurant and try to turn it around. I'm not sure I could sell it to the TV network – but here's an idea – a church makeover! The cameras will follow a consultant into a struggling church and will watch as they transform it into a thriving mega-church. Yeah right!

But maybe there are some shared lessons to be learnt from the restaurant makeovers.

1. Simplify the menu

Many of the failing restaurants have a menu that tries to compete against the big restaurants – but that requires holding a host of ingredients on site, overworking the limited number of chefs, and requires a wide range of skills.

Better for a restaurant to identify the skills and happiness of the chef and to limit the menu to what they can do in terms of competence and time. There's less stock on hand, meals are more practiced, and you can earn a reputation for a speciality.

In the church it means stopping the competition with the big churches – don't try and do everything that others do – band, choir, children's activities, festivals, etc. What's the skill and passion of the church leadership? Less is more – it's better to do a few ministries well than a lot poorly.

2. Buy local, cook fresh

The freshest food is going to be that which is bought locally – most failing restaurants use frozen products that are sourced far away. People don't want to eat at a restaurant if the food is the same that might make at home or get at lots of other places. Celebrate local skills in production and cooking.

A church also needs to be authentic in what it offers. Don't use services, sermons or teaching material from USA – not because it's not good, it's just not locally relevant. Make sure that your church carries with it a local flavour – something of the community in which it dwells.

3. Ask for assistance

The restaurant makeovers are usually the first help that people have got since they started their business – and from the reactions, it took a bit of persuasion. No one person has all the skills needed in a restaurant – cooking, planning, finance, décor, service. If you can't do the books – get someone in who can.

Churches are the same – we need help at times to get things done. The bureaucratic red tape is getting stickier, and we can't just shrug the shoulders. We've got to learn to ask for help. Nor should we let one or two people try and do everything – they might be willing, but they are seldom skilled across the breadth of need.

4. Work smarter, not harder

Many of the restaurant makeovers show owners who work really hard to make things happen – they're just doing the wrong things. Generally it comes down to the need of the boss to delegate some of the tasks, trust people to the task and keep a watch.

Some of the busiest people in our churches need to give some thought to delegation – and to empowering people to act without constant supervision. It may take training – but when they have learnt the task, it's a lighter load.

5. Look after the current customers

People who already know their way through the door are easier to keep than finding new people to give it a try. Restaurant makeovers are often shown along with a fair amount of abuse thrown at the customers – and that's the support base.

Any makeover in the church has to consider the current members and ensure that they are happy with the process and the possible outcome.

6. Tidy up the place

There are some wonderful images of pretty disgusting restaurants that haven't had a decent clean for a long time. Who wants to eat by a window sill laden with dead flies, or eat with blotchy cutlery.

We get used to our church – the old notices and paintwork. Many churches look like they are museum exhibits and people don't really expect to find live bodies there. It's amazing what a drop of paint or working bee can do to change the feel of a church.

7. Find a signature dish

It's pretty pointless if you are making steak meals alongside 15 other steak restaurants. People want to know that what is on offer is special – and that it has taken some skill to make it. A signature dish sets a restaurant apart and draws people in.

Churches will also have special things that they do – carols in the park, Remembrance Day, Easter sunrise service. Do a few and do them well. Get known in the community for a quality event.

8. Rekindle the passion for cooking

At the end of each makeover there is often that point when the owner becomes passionate again about cooking and their restaurant. They burn again with a desire to make great food and see people enjoy it.

Find again the passion of faith – the hope of the Gospel that has burned at times on the faith journey. Rejoice in that passion, encourage it, talk about it.