

Cracking Community Cafés

Your people

These fact sheets are produced by Ethical Eats, Making Local Food Work and Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency to help new and existing community cafés get to grips with the basics of running a successful enterprise.

This fact sheet looks at leading and managing the people involved in your community café. It suggests some simple things you can do to build a strong team and motivate everyone. In our earlier fact sheets, we covered marketing, sustainable sourcing and managing finances: none of these activities would be possible without your team, and it is fitting that we end this series with a focus on the people who make it all happen.

If you have any questions about this fact sheet or would like any support with your community café, contact Charlotte Jarman on charlotte@sustainweb.org or call 020 7837 1228

Stepney City Farm Café, credit Cherry Smart

Your café

A great place to work

➔ Investing your time to create an environment in which staff can thrive is well worth the effort. Customers will warm to a positive atmosphere too. Where to start?

Sharing your vision and objectives

Is everyone clear about the purpose of your café and the things you think are important?

Make sure everyone shares your vision for the café: who it serves, its relationship with the local community and the ethos or values you hold dear – such as great quality food, friendly customer service, sustainable sourcing, and support for disadvantaged groups in your community.

See also [Promoting your café](#) and [Getting the food right](#) fact sheets.

When things go wrong or difficult situations arise, it is often because people are working to different ends or there is confusion about why they are doing what they do. In a busy café environment it is easy to miss the bigger picture when there are dishes to prepare or customers to serve.

In one of your team meetings invite everyone to tell you what they think about the café and why it exists: this can help with motivation and highlight areas where a reminder may be helpful.

Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Sometimes it may appear that people are not listening. Remember that we engage with others in different ways and one approach to communication may not be effective for everyone. Don't just tell them, show them as well.

Bring everyone together a couple of times each year to make time and space for your team to step back and reflect on your café's performance and contribute to the plan for the future.

Inspire and motivate

In a busy café it's easy to forget why we do what we do. Why not take time for a 'fast five' team meeting for five minutes every day? Talk about things happening that day – for example, specials, soups of the day, offers – and invite colleagues to share success stories. Remind yourselves of how the service you offer and the money you generate is helping good things to happen.

Achieving your objectives, such as introducing a new menu or revamping your prices, involves lots of small steps. Take time to celebrate these steps towards success to help keep people motivated. Let people know that they and their hard work are valued.

The Crisis Skylight Café in London, a social enterprise and training café run by the national charity for homeless people, has a wall display with uplifting photos, stories, and information about its work.

Giving people 'ownership' of tasks can be a great motivator and enable them to learn from any mistakes.

However, make sure the essentials are right or your attempts to motivate may fall on stony ground: it is hard

to be positive if the kitchen is dangerous or the workload is unreasonable! Is equipment up to task? Are there any unspoken grumbles? Think of ways to give your staff a voice without putting them on the spot.

Customer service and selling

Great customer service is important to any business, and community cafés are no exception. Selling and great service don't come naturally to everyone, so take time to help everyone in the café feel comfortable dealing with customers and promoting your business.

Encourage waiting staff and volunteers to report back to the kitchen with any customer queries, complaints or compliments. They are the café's eyes and ears for problems and opportunities, such as any increase in the food left on plates or conversations about your delicious food!

See the [Getting the food right](#) fact sheet.



Crisis Skylight Café, credit Sam Mellish

Your team members

Investing in them

➔ A good team that you can rely on starts with recruiting the best combination of staff and volunteers for your café. And a well-managed and trained team, working together for the same goals, will repay your investment in them.

Recruitment

Recruiting new staff or volunteers is an important part of management. It can be helpful to separate how you define a particular role – the **Job Description** – from the type of person you would like to fill the position – the **Person Specification**.

Think about where you can advertise for free through your own local networks and for example through the Ethical Eats Google Group or environmentjob.co.uk

A Person Specification is a list of the experience, skills, educational achievements and personal qualities you wish the successful candidate to possess. Identify the things you consider to be essential and those that would be nice to have, or desirable. This will help you to make decisions when choosing between promising candidates.

It is a good idea to prepare a Job Description for the work that volunteers do as well as staff. Whether they are new to the café or were customers in the past, this will help everyone to understand their contribution to the café and the wider team.

When it comes to interviews, why not involve other members of staff to show candidates around or join the interview panel? This can be a great way to help others in the team gain new experience and skills, and to feel that they are valued and involved in processes that will affect the whole team.

Make the key relationships work well

There are some relationships that must work well if your café is to run smoothly and successfully. The relationship between the chef and the waiting staff is an obvious example. If difficult situations arise, take some time out to remind everyone of the common purpose: great food, great service, happy customers!

Your relationship with your accountant or book-keeper is also key: they can bring a wealth of experience and advice to your café, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Tell them good stories about the organisation they're helping, so they feel motivated too.

Make sure staff and volunteers know they can come and talk to you about any issues so resentments don't brew.

Don't just rely on the fabulous few

Think ahead: have a contingency plan in place in case someone is unable to work. It will reduce your own stress and is an important part of managing a team. Spread the experience around your team so that others know how the tasks critical to your success, such as ordering stock and making dishes, are done.

Where appropriate, set up activities so that they become part of the routine and use checklists to help people ensure that all the essential tasks are completed every day. These are also essential in case of staff absence so everyone understands exactly what needs to happen, and when.

We all learn in different ways: some people like to learn by doing, while others prefer to read up before taking their first steps.

Training and development

Help staff and volunteers to help you by providing the appropriate training for their individual roles – think about the necessary skills for the role, the right level for their experience and expertise, and how they learn best.

Prepare an individual training plan for staff – and for volunteers. Think about whether experienced and skilled team members might be able to help someone else learn a new skill. The opportunity to gain different experience is a big reason why people volunteer and it is a chance for the café to give something back.

And don't forget yourself! Training in management and leadership is available in various formats, with some specifically tailored for charities or social enterprises.



Effective management

Getting the basics right

➔ Making sure you keep on the right side of the law and spending time getting your policies and procedures in order should save you time later on.

Day-to-day management

Day-to-day café management is about three things: getting the job done, working well as a team and developing the skills of individual staff members.

Look for opportunities to combine these tasks. For example, ask a small group of staff and volunteers to work together on waste reduction, with one of the group coordinating this work.

Organise your policies and procedures

Make sure everyone is familiar with the key policies and procedures you follow to keep on top of food hygiene, health and safety and other legal requirements. Procedures should be easy to understand and share with others: the simpler the better!

Some cafés print procedures (such as how to place an order for supplies) on durable, laminated sheets that are kept easily accessible in the café or office.

Those checklists, discussed earlier, will also come in handy.

Keep on top of health and safety

Good health and safety is about taking a common-sense approach to avoiding accidents and other problems. Prepare a policy and update it regularly. The law requires you to conduct a risk assessment: this simply means considering the things that could go wrong and taking steps to address each risk. If you have five or more employees, you are also legally required to record your risk assessment. [The Health & Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) website has useful information and templates to help you with this. Consider the specifics of your café: for example, do you have staff, volunteers or visitors with special needs that might mean they are more vulnerable to a hazard like a hot pan or a trip hazard in the table area?

Get to grips with employment law

You may have been successfully running the café so far, but need help managing people – staff and/or volunteers. Perhaps you have already hired your first employees but hit a few problems. The [GOV.UK](#) and [ACAS](#) websites offer advice and information on the legal aspects of employing staff: contracts, holidays, redundancies, pensions, hiring and more. For advice and support on good practice for working with volunteers go to organisations like [Volunteering England](#).

Useful links

Ethical Eats – a network of restaurants, cafés and caterers interested in sustainability: www.ethicaleats.org

The Cracking Community Café fact sheets are downloadable at www.sustainweb.org/ethicaleats/publications/

Making Local Food Work – a project supporting community food enterprises, with a range of how-to guides: www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk

Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency – supports co-operatives, community initiatives and social enterprises, and provides practical training for catering enterprises: www.greenwich-cda.org.uk

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) – provides training and advice to help improve employment relations. Look for Help for small firms under 'Tools and Resources' on their website: www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4231 and they offer a free helpline on 08457 47 47 47.

Use their 'model workplace' to check how good your organisation is at people management and get suggestions for how to improve: www.acas.org.uk/modelworkplace

GOV.UK – the government website has lots of information on the legal aspects of employment: www.gov.uk/browse/employing-people

The Health and Safety Executive – provides guidance on health and safety and the law: www.hse.gov.uk/catering

Institute of Leadership and Management – a network of training providers that can help you to develop your leadership and management skills: www.i-l-m.com

Social Enterprise UK – offers advice and support for social enterprises: www.socialenterprise.org.uk/advice-support/social-enterprises

Volunteering England – offers useful advice and support, for example, 'The Good Practice Bank' aims to provide volunteer managers with information about how to support volunteering: www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice

You can also sign up to the '3R promise' on volunteer management at www.volunteering.org.uk/who-we-can-help/volunteer-involving-organisations/volunteerrights