



Bill Schwartz

CHTP is CEO of System Concepts, Inc. (SCI). Based in Scottsdale, Ariz., SCI specializes in helping clients control F&B costs, and is the developer of the FOOD-TRAK Food and Beverage Procurement and Inventory Control System. Bill can be reached at bills@foodtrak.com.

You can't manage what you can't see

Bad things don't happen as frequently in broad daylight as they do in the dark.

Unfortunately, food and beverage departments have a number of places where it's simply too dark to see what's going on. Trash cans, drains, bottoms of containers and closed boxes are just a few of these places. Developing methods for "seeing" what happens in these places leads to improved food and beverage cost control.

- **Trash Patrol**—"Many years ago when I was working room service in a Las Vegas casino, the F&B Director walked into the kitchen and dumped a full trash receptacle onto the floor," relates Tim Hicks, director of food and beverage for Augustine Casino in California. "At the time, I thought to myself, this guy is a total idiot. We were extremely busy and the trash made a tremendous mess. The contents were thoroughly searched and there were several items he found that were discarded. Among the trash was silverware, individually wrapped condiments, an oil cruet as well as an unpaid guest check." Hicks now makes it a habit to occasionally check the trash to "see" what's there, and uses that knowledge to take the appropriate steps.

- **Profits Down the Drain?**—Once something goes down the drain, the only people likely to see it work at the water treatment plant. And those folks aren't the least bit interested in identifying the stuff they see. On the other hand, it is amazing how much can be learned about waste if it were only possible to identify what went down the drain. For example, one hotel client was showing a huge variance in egg usage each month. After implementing waste sheets, the

kitchen manager discovered that the staff was dumping out a batch of egg wash every night. The end result was a loss of over 1,000 eggs per month! Armed with information about what's going down the drain, managers can determine whether to reduce batch sizes, change production schedules, or take other actions to solve the problem.

- **Keep Your Head Down and Chop, Chop, Chop**—The prep area is another major source of excess waste. Prep waste typically ends up in a trash can or down the drain. Either way, it is hard to see the trim, and therefore hard to manage it.

weight, number of portions of each type of cut, and final yield percentage. The actual numbers are compared against carefully developed standards to determine the performance of the meat cutters. If yields are lower than they should be, and the problem is not product-related, improved training or supervision may be necessary.

- **Allowing Others to See**—Studies have shown that adults don't learn as well with their ears as they do with their eyes. Posting instructions, educational materials, recipes, cooking procedures, storage techniques and other useful

When it comes to reducing waste, theft, over-prep and other losses, the immortal words "Let There Be Light!" can have new meaning. Perhaps that banner should be posted over the manager's desk.

One successful approach is to utilize clear Lexan bins in the prep areas. Instead of discarding trim in a trash can or down the drain, prep staff can be directed to place all trim in the Lexan bins. When managers make their rounds, they can examine the bins to "see" if any excess trim has occurred. Only after the bins have been checked can they be emptied into the trash.

- **Let Them Cut Meat**—Huge amounts of money can be lost cutting meat and fish. Both skill and speed play a role here, and while most managers assume their meat cutters are skilled, they may not have a good way to monitor that. Cutting charts are a great way to "see" exactly what's happening when meat or fish is butchered. These charts are used to indicate the starting

information can help the staff see what management wants them to know.

For example, posting trim guidelines in prep areas improves the odds that prep staff will avoid costly mistakes. Posting storage and food preservation guidelines on coolers can help reduce spoilage due to improper storage. Too many kitchens rely on hands-on instruction as the primary tool for kitchen staff training. Labeling shelves in storage areas can improve kitchen efficiency and help avoid over-ordering when staff can't find what they are looking for.

When it comes to reducing waste, theft, over-prep and other losses, the immortal words "Let There Be Light!" can have new meaning. Perhaps that banner should be posted over the manager's desk. 🌟