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# INTRODUCTION

This is our manifesto. It outlines the principles that inform our culture at The Ninth and influence every decision that we make. We believe in integrity, trust, mutual respect, teamwork and personal growth. We want every member of our team to find fulfillment in their work and be inspired. These are the pillars on which we build our restaurant culture.

I've been working in restaurants for 32 years. While there are many aspects of our industry that I love, I believe that we need to take a serious look at our workplace culture and make a conscious effort to improve it. Part of the problem is that we are never taught how to create a positive culture. There's no one to guide us, or properly explain the impact that our words, actions and policy choices can have. We give so much care and attention to the quality of the food and the service that the culture gets forgotten or becomes an afterthought. It should be our priority.


I started cooking in 1991 which was a different era of restaurants. While the culinary training I gained was invaluable, I spent many unhappy hours in most of those restaurants: we were so intimidated by the chef that all we could focus on was self-preservation. The result was a fearful and aggressive kitchen with no teamwork. I didn't feel valued or respected so I felt no sense of loyalty. To protect myself from the verbal abuse, I became emotionally detached which made me uncaring and unable to empathise. I decided then if I ever had the opportunity to own my own restaurant, I would create an environment where people could enjoy their work and feel valued as part of the team. This was the very beginning of my journey.

Since we opened The Ninth in 2015, we have focused on prioritising our team and developing our culture. It is my hope that this manifesto will deepen the understanding of our values within the team and have a positive impact on the wider industry too.

I have wanted to write this manifesto for a long-time, however I have struggled to put the culture we were creating into words. Then just as the industry was recovering post-pandemic, a kitchen fire in July 2022 forced us to close our restaurant for over seven months. Under pressure, our culture held together. We proved our commitment to our team, protected their jobs and came back galvanised as an even stronger team. This difficult period also gave me time to reflect and really understand how our culture is created and write this manifesto.

We are not perfect, we get things wrong, apologise when necessary, and try again. It's this struggle to constantly improve our culture that defines us.

Our culture is the most important part of working at The Ninth.



Jun Tanaka

# **WE LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

## **The Leadership Team**

It is our responsibility to build and nurture a respectful restaurant culture and we believe leading by example is the most powerful way to influence the team.

We lead with integrity so it's vital that our words and actions align to build trust and confidence within the team.

It is our responsibility to earn the respect of the team and not for the team to give us respect because of our position. We interact with the team in a respectful manner. We work harder and to the highest standard and we are willing to perform any task that needs to be done. We listen to the team's opinions, communicate clearly and give direct and honest feedback.

It is our responsibility to support and to inspire the team. We prioritise the team and demonstrate this through our decisions and actions. When the team feels that they are truly valued, they are more loyal and dedicated to the team and feel more fulfilled in their work.

We take ownership of the team's failures and the successes are credited to everyone.

We lead with a positive attitude. We don't want bad moods to have a negative impact on the team. We take full responsibility for our own behaviour and we focus on taking time before reacting. If we lose control, this will erode some of the trust and respect that has taken time to build.

We endeavour to personify our culture.

# OUR VISION STATEMENT

## **To be our team and guests' favourite restaurant**

We love the word favourite because it triggers a strong emotional response. A favourite dish might be a meal your mother cooked, so connected to feelings of nurture and care, imbued with positive memories. A favourite restaurant transcends the menu: it's somewhere you feel welcome and cared for, and where you can relax and be yourself. There is no better compliment than when a guest says 'The Ninth is my favourite restaurant.'

In the same way, if one of the team says 'The Ninth is my favourite restaurant I've worked in', that says a lot about us. It means we have created a working environment where people feel valued, fulfilled and inspired.

# FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

When we opened The Ninth in 2015, we started with a team of five who had previously worked together and we knew had a shared ethos. Even before we opened the restaurant we agreed that the team would always be our number one priority.

Our leadership team shares the same values and visions for the restaurant. We set and maintain high standards of mutual respect within the team. It's also our responsibility to recruit, train, and support team members that share these values.

We are committed to recruiting team members who can help uphold a positive workplace culture. Personality and attitude matter more than cooking or serving skills - those can be taught and improved on.

When we interview potential candidates, we discuss our culture and our vision and what we look for in a team member. We do this before we talk about the food, the service or the benefits so the candidate truly understands our priorities. We also ask the candidates about their own goals and aspirations during the interview so we can use this information for their personal growth plan.

When a person is invited for a trial shift we give them a full tour and introduce them to the team. We explain what they will be doing that day and take time to properly demonstrate the skills required. We encourage the team to take time to get to know the candidate. We want the potential employee to understand how we treat our people even before they join the team.

From experience we've learned that it's not worth employing or retaining people who are the wrong fit for our team, just so we have enough people.

# SMALL GESTURES HAVE A BIG IMPACT

Every daily interaction with fellow team members affects how we feel about ourselves and our work.

How we speak to each other really matters. We greet everyone at the start of a shift and say goodbye when we leave. This seems obvious but it has a significant impact. Everyone likes to feel noticed and appreciated.

Even when working under pressure, we say please and thank you. We all work hard and it's important to be acknowledged.

As a team, it's important that we listen to and respect everyone's opinions. To encourage the junior team members to develop confidence in expressing their opinions, the leader aims to be the last to speak. This also helps us learn from each other.

All of us have lives outside work with different interests, responsibilities, challenges and dreams. We take a genuine interest in each other's lives and regularly check in with each other. Understanding our team as individuals helps us all work better together.

We acknowledge that mistakes happen to everyone. Regardless of position, it's important that we admit mistakes, apologise and learn from the experience.

We don't speak negatively about others behind their backs. Instead we give feedback directly and with respect.

## CREATING A ONE TEAM MINDSET

Our restaurant operates as one team. The front of house and kitchen teams have a one team mindset, with mutual respect, support and appreciation for the different skills each team member brings to the restaurant.

One of the positives that came out of the fire was the time that it gave us together as a team. During the seven-month closure, we organised two training sessions every week for the whole team. We tried everything from mushroom foraging to yoga. These shared activities brought the team closer while we learned new skills together. The front of house and kitchen teams learned to appreciate each other and became closer than ever before. We can feel the positive effect that this has on everything we do.

We now organise weekly training sessions involving the entire team. Everyone has the opportunity to give a training session on a subject they would like to share with the team. This builds confidence, encourages knowledge sharing and gives a feeling of contributing to the team. It is also an opportunity for us to learn more about our team members' passions and interests.

Every four months, we organise an off-site training session. This could be a visit to a supplier or inviting a specialist to teach us about a particular subject. Time spent together outside of work is invaluable.

We sit down together in the restaurant at 11am for lunch and at 4.30pm for dinner. The chefs make the effort to cook a delicious meal and the waiters set the table and fill the water bottles. These are small gestures that we do for each other and it shows we care.

Before going home, team members are encouraged to check in with those still on shift to see if they need anything. Frequently offering help cultivates a supportive culture.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL GROWTH

Personal growth is essential for a fulfilling career. We care deeply about the goals and aspirations of each team member and want everyone to feel valued and supported as they work towards achieving their goals. We want every team member to feel they are constantly growing and improving their skills.

Every team member has their own personal growth plan. We take time to create and develop meaningful goals with each team member. We meet every 4 months to review their goals, make sure they are on track, and revise their goals. This is also an opportunity to share feedback and to find out how they are doing.

We spend extra time and attention training new team members. They spend their first two weeks working side by side with an experienced team member. We understand that learning a new job can be very daunting and we want each person to feel supported. We catch up after the first week to check in and help solve any initial issues and do the same after a month and three months in the role. We aim to help with any issues before they become a bigger problem, and let people know that their concerns will always be listened to.

Every three weeks, we organise a wine training session for the front of house team.

We take the time to teach the team members properly. First, we demonstrate a task clearly, then allow the team member to perform the task under supervision with support and encouragement. The team member will then perform the task by themselves with the team leader checking their work afterwards and giving feedback and support when necessary.

We practice Kaizen – a culture of continuous improvement. Every team member knows their job better than anyone else and we want to know where we can improve. So, we ask our team members three questions. What issue have you identified? Why is this an issue? and lastly what is your solution? This gives every team member the ownership of solving the issue that they have identified. This also gives a feeling that every person has a voice.

# COMMUNICATION IS KEY

We believe you cannot communicate too much. Open, honest and regular communication allows us to better work together and support each other to succeed.

We have a kitchen briefing at 8.45am - we go through the week's covers, the VIPs and parties for the coming week. We share the positive and negative feedback from guests. We discuss any maintenance or supplier issues. If we have a trial organised, we share their name and position they are applying for. We discuss any changes to the menu. At 5.15pm we have a meeting with the front of house team where we share the same information. By doing this daily, the whole team are fully aware of everything that is going on within the restaurant.

The kitchen and front of house teams hold a joint meeting at least once a week. This helps develop a one team mindset and helps avoid errors in communication.

We ensure that the leadership team all demonstrate tasks in the same way and share the same information with the team. This includes recipes, plating up dishes and standard operating procedures. If we are not aligned, this will cause confusion which can lead to dissatisfaction.

Our leadership team meets every week to discuss recruitment, training, areas of improvement and new ideas.

We share the daily revenue and monthly profit and loss figures with the entire team. We go through food and drink costs and discuss the restaurant's financial performance. This gives the team a sense of ownership and a better understanding of the bigger picture.

We use an App that all the team can access to share information. We share the rota, recipes, maintenance callouts, trials that have been arranged and pre orders. This helps to reduce miscommunication and the need to repeat the same information.

We have our vision statement laminated and displayed on all the back of house areas.

## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

We believe in work-life balance. We acknowledge that this is one of the most challenging aspects of working in our industry, especially with the current staffing shortage. Our goal is to build a good work-life balance along with a sustainable restaurant business.

Our core team works seven shifts per week over four or five days depending on whether they work in the kitchen or front of house. We understand that the team wants flexibility so will do our best to accommodate requests for days off and holidays.

The restaurant is closed every Sunday, all bank holidays, four days over Easter and twelve days over Christmas and New Year.

Our last orders on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are 9pm and 9.30pm on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

We understand that along with fair pay and excellent working culture, work-life balance is a priority for all of us.

# SHARING FEEDBACK

We praise in public and reprimand in private. We know that if team members are reprimanded in front of others, the person will focus more on the shame than the feedback. It is always better in private, one to one. We only reprimand in public if it is an issue that has to be dealt with immediately.

We celebrate our team member's successes openly. We have a Top Player award every month. This person is chosen by our leadership team. We announce the nominations and winner in front of the whole team. We explain why this person was chosen and they are celebrated by the whole team.

We also have a Top Leader award every three months. This person is chosen because they have demonstrated that they personify our culture.

If a chef or waiter has a bad service, we do our best not to discuss this during the service. We focus on solving the problem as quickly as possible then we sit down with them straight after service to talk it through. By then, everyone has calmed down and the feedback can be given without emotion. The recipient can then really understand their mistake and how to improve.

Our feedback is direct and to the point. We want to make the message clear and not leave anyone guessing. We don't make feedback personal, it's about the action not the person's character.

When giving feedback, we're specific. We avoid using 'always' or 'never'. So instead of saying, "You're always late", we will be specific and say "You have been 5 minutes late three times this month." Rather than, "You're great!", we say "I'm happy with the quality of your work and how you organise your section."

Feedback is most useful when it's given both ways. During one-to-ones the leadership team ask for feedback too. This can be awkward for junior team members, so we ask three questions. Tell me one thing that I can stop doing to make your work better. Tell me one thing that I can start doing and finally tell me one thing that I should continue doing. When the feedback is given, it's important not to push back or become defensive and only ask questions for clarification.

When a team member leaves, we conduct an exit interview. This is our opportunity to learn about the reason someone is leaving and assess if any improvements can be made.

# THE ROAD AHEAD

We commit to reviewing this manifesto regularly. It is intended to be a useful guide so we will update it as we continue to learn and develop our workplace culture.

We will critically examine our policies and their results and ensure that we do not stray from our core values. We will keep listening to feedback from our team members. We will undoubtedly make mistakes but we commit to learning from them and continuing to improve.

There is no end goal, this is a journey that we are on together.

My hope is that you will take what you learn here and share this with your future teams.

Jun Tanaka

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jun Tanaka', with a stylized flourish at the end.

29th July 2023

# SUMMARY

1. We lead by example. We interact with the team in a respectful manner. We work harder and to the highest standard. We are willing to perform any task that needs to be done. We listen to everyone's opinions.
2. We recruit, train and support team members that share our values.
3. How we speak with each other really matters. We greet everyone at the start of the shift and say goodbye when we leave. We say please and thank you even when working under pressure. We apologise when we make mistakes. We do not speak negatively about others behind their backs.
4. Our front of house and kitchen have a one team mindset, with mutual respect, support and appreciation for the different skills each team member brings to the restaurant.
5. We care deeply about the goals and aspirations of each team member and want everyone to feel valued and supported as they work towards achieving their goals.
6. We believe that you cannot communicate too much. Open, honest, regular communication allows us to better work together and support each other to succeed.
7. Our goal is to build a good work-life balance along with a sustainable restaurant business.
8. We praise in public and reprimand in private. We give feedback on the specific action and not the person's character. We ask for feedback and listen with an open mind.