

YEHYA ABOUZAHR (YAZ)

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PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

A Hospitality Professional with over 20 years of experience successfully opening and managing multi-location fine dining restaurants, and several franchises; representing some of the most iconic brands in the hospitality business across North America, the GCC countries and Asia. Extensive training from the best professionals in the industry in all areas of Hospitality covering food science, quality control points, food & beverage (F&B), FOH, BOH, and the secrets of a successful brand with practical experience in all areas of culinary in the multiple kitchens of a world-leading luxury hotel/resort. Proficient in creating exceptional dining ambiances; synchronizing BOH & FOH operations working with a variety of cuisines (including Japanese, Chinese, Italian, American), fusions and unique innovations to create palatable pleasing gustatory sensations; and harnessing the power of technology to delight guests such as VIPs, international tourists, and celebrities. A proven record of: Establishing valuable restaurant vendors, building high-performance teams, making a positive impact in local communities, and hosting glamorous, highly successful Grand Openings. Formally recognized and awarded for the highest sales, maintained after new restaurant opening (NRO) at a Business Conference in Washington, D.C.

A resourceful, results-oriented, fiscally responsible leader and problem solver with strong attention to detail in attaining operational standards that result in a high level of guest satisfaction. Methodical in recognizing key performance drivers based on understanding of the local and global hospitality trends and following through with pragmatic actions to optimise food, beverage and service while inspiring team support to delight guests from all around the world.

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Head of Corporate Operations (Assignment-Task force) – SUSHIAH, Jeddah, KSA Jul 2023 – Feb 2024

Assigned to establish the corporate headquarters (HQ) and boost the operational efficiency, sales and profitability of this Japanese restaurant chain in Saudi Arabia with three branches; a fine dining restaurant in Jeddah, and two branches in Makkah; reported directly to the CEO

- Developed and implemented strategic and tactical plans to drive the achievement of long- and short-term targets following a thorough strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis
- Identified, verified and prioritized the key areas for improvement within a detailed action plan aimed at generating immediate results while creating the foundation for continued business progress
- Focused on areas such as Revenue Generation (menu development, marketing, social media, major attractions), Operations (renovation and workflow design optimization, inventory, warehousing, supply chain, automation, HQ, quality control), Human Resources (staff development, establish KPIs, training manual & employee handbook, track vacation and absence, policies for social media and third party recruitment) Finance (staffing, budgets, F&B costing system, petty cash and float controls, overtime tracking, sales tracking, waste control)
- Spearheaded the business transformation process to deliver results through enterprise-wide interactions with management and staff, and full P&L accountability
- Reviewed operations by leading department meetings/discussions, including weekly conference calls with all RGM to discuss finance, important matters, sales, and other KPIs; participated in identifying issues, corrective actions, action plans, allocating tasks and establishing performance benchmarks

Accomplishments

- Enhanced the profile of the company by hiring and showcasing a Japanese celebrity chef, partnering with notable Japanese names such as Zokei & Hobayaki to strengthen authenticity, attracting high-caliber guests such as foreign ambassadors and business leaders, and upgrading marketing collaterals such as signage with client names and printed ribbons with the name of the restaurant and greetings in Japanese language
- Improved the digital presence of the company by leading website development (hired a US company) with a content management system (CMS) and social media activities to showcase the restaurant with photos, company profile & story, social media link, chat, private event page featuring upcoming promotions & social events
- Attracted, delighted and retained a large guest base through creative menu planning and development, introducing new items F&B items, creating personalized menus for guests featuring their names for special occasions, hiring popular DJs, singers and musical bands; also coordinated with Marketing on social media posts
- Capitalized on holidays to entice guests with special holiday décor, F&B creativity and inviting distinctive celebrity chefs; planned and coordinated these events with Marketing with ample time to generate public interests
- Optimized Marketing effectiveness and return on investment (ROI) by building who, what, where, when, why (5 Ws) concept brief to every marketing activity/promotion to best understand specific problems and find solutions; analyzing guest feedback, monitoring KPIs for data-driven decision-making; and creating an annual marketing activities calendar as well local store marketing (LSM) with strategies and tactics that address specific performance goals and the targeted guest base

- Strengthened and conveyed the company's culture, values and image by overseeing the building, furnishing and staffing of the corporate HQ, creating a centralized space to host and unite the senior management team; also recruited and oriented the CFO and the Head of HR to the hospitality business, established SOPs and communication strategy; and created mission statement, core values, company culture, and vision
- Ensured the safe, timely and cost-effective availability of food items to meet operational demands by building and linking warehouse to the restaurants and purchasing a refrigerated truck to expediate delivery, and creating and implementing SOPs to govern purchasing, receiving, storing, issuing, and delivery procedures, including stock rotation, vehicle temperature testing and cleanliness inspection
- Employed technology and empowered staff to improve efficiency by coordinating with the IT department on POS configuration and building system features to track all operational activities with validation; the system provided valuable feedback to facilitate continuous improvements in areas such as kitchen operations, guest service, marketing, new menu item sales and related areas; also implemented the use of the ZEN HR software
- Drove sustainable growth and created memorable guest experiences by coordinating with IT to build an on-line restaurant reservation and elevating the POS software from Foodics to Aloha
- Enhanced operational standards and employee performance by creating checklists and tracking systems for bar, floor, kitchen, quality assurance, food safety, sanitation, housekeeping, walk thru, opening and closing together with a master allergies matrix and guide together with manuals for all FOH & BOH positions as well as for guest complaints, food safety, KSA culture and food, (sequence of service (SOS))
- Verified operational standards by coordinating audits across all stores using QSR Activity report covering food safety, sanitation, hygiene; and hiring an overseas task force specialized with duct system, exhaust, hoods, and air balance to coordinate with the Maintenance team on daily and monthly checks to track equipment operations and control cleanliness; used Ecolab Chemical cost control
- Created new sources of revenue for the company while expanding the client base by establishing a catering services, an Express department and a Car Hop
- Reduced operational cost by 10% working with the CFO on semi and yearly budgets for marketing, operating expenses, HR, and purchasing; also built F&B menu costing tables-adjusted recipes due to yield 0, adjusted pricing based on menu engineering analysis, created petty cash, cash float custodial forms, participated in costing for all promotional set menu, LTO's, seasonal menus, Happy Hour and built a cash flow tracker to all suppliers

General Manager, Task Force (Assignment) - PURA VIDA MIAMI, Doha, Qatar

Jan 2022 – Feb 2023

Spearheaded the setup, staffing and full-fledge operations of this restaurant with an indoor seating capacity of 20 and 120 outdoor within the established budget, while maintaining guest service standards, policies, procedures and operational protocols of the famous restaurant chain from Miami Beach Florida; reported to the CEO & the Corporate Chef in the Miami Corporate Office using MS Teams

- Planned, organized and directed the restaurant operations and development processes from the pre-construction phase until the grand opening to create the ambience, food and beverage service, and general operations to delight guests and achieve optimal guest satisfaction; communicated in Arabic, English and French languages as suitable
- Monitored and coordinated construction and procurement operations working with Engineers and the Development Director under Aura Hospitality in Qatar (partnership with Pura Vida)
- Sourced, purchased and organized delivery logistics of non-food items such as landscaping service, furniture, lighting, music system, air conditioning system, cutlery, POS system and peripherals including digital menu products and tablets (collaborated with IT), and disposable supplies as well as food items and ingredients
- Scheduled and coordinated recruitment in Bahrain prior to restaurant construction; sourced, screened and selected top talent including executive chef, restaurant managers, supervisors, servers, kitchen staff, waiters, and line cooks; provided onboarding, training to the entire team (entry level to management) ensuring job readiness
- Created a highly efficient and stress-free work environment for all team members by building rapport between kitchen (BOH) and front of house (FOH) staff and strengthening collaboration among the department managers
- Analyzed sales figures to set, monitor, and control budget for the business while anticipating guest needs, upcoming events, seasonal trends, and special activities
- Developed and implemented efficient processes to manage and control food and beverage inventory while creating an environment that was supportive of creative solutions for continuous improvement (CI)
- Collaborate with Sales & Marketing managers in developing and driving guest outreach, communication, and marketing efforts, including the coordination of private & semi-private events
- Monitored guest experience, responded promptly & courteously to any requests and verified that the restaurant met or exceeded standards of food and beverage quality, service level, safety, and cleanliness, as well as overall guest satisfaction

Accomplishments

- Established a valuable network of reliable vendors to meet operational demands; initiated contact, completed vendor reviews and nurtured relationship while managing the ordering and receiving cycle for the business
- Secured significant savings while complying with the company's new restaurant opening (NRO) checklist by negotiating and setting up contracts for purchases as well as annual maintenance contracts (AMC) and marketing
- Built a high-performance team through effective selection, hiring, and training while initiating actions to maintain high morale and constantly raising the bar and motivating the business towards a higher level of achievement
- Hosted a glamorous and successful Grand Opening to promote healthy, gluten-free trendy foods with special events such as yoga sessions and social media blitz that attracted approximately 500 people, including paparazzi, VIP guests and the editors of major hospitality magazines; while supporting the Marketing Director from USA
- Made a positive impact in the community by providing healthy food and attracting a population that values quality and health by delivering wholesome food and beverage items that suited today's lifestyle within an intimate yet efficient environment of a beautiful and elegant restaurant setting that generated memorable experiences

General/Training & Operations Manager - OLAYAN FOOD DIVISION, Muscat, Oman Jan 2017 – Dec 2021

Established and managed this Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant with seating capacity of up to 250 from scratch to full-service operations creating legendary experiences for guests in compliance with franchise guidelines working with a task force from Saudi Arabia and Dubai and a team from the USA for its Grand Opening

- Designed kitchen layout for maximum efficiency with careful consideration of food preparation process, workflow sequence, and equipment placement; purchased equipment, storage facilities, and other requirements
- Ensured quality, consistency and reliability in operations by establishing supplier contracts, food safety and sanitation standards, and operational checklists to verify performance and meet operational and catering needs
- Designed menu items, and conducted one month of mock training following the Buffalo Wild Wings (BWW) standards/manual consisting of cooking classes, food sampling by staff and meaningful discussions
- Oversaw the installation and use of the Aloha POS with an smart automated system, as well as the setup of a non-alcoholic beverage bar, and multiple giant screen TVs to entertain guests
- Maximized financial performance by engaging in strategic (long-term) and tactical (short-term) business planning and directing the overall management and operation of all aspects of the restaurant to drive success across all areas, including P&L, revenue generation, cost control, and marketing spend with excellent ROI
- Administered the operations budget to maintain oversight and ensure the fiscal integrity of the restaurant; regularly reviewed financial statements, sales and activity reports to inform senior-level decision making
- Performed required monthly Quality and International system in Place and executed semi-yearly Menu Engineering to meet changing demands and stay on-trend

Accomplishments

- Generated city-wide excitement and fanfare for the restaurant by initiating the branding of a limousine with Buffalo Wild Wings logo and colour scheme; recruiting beautiful models to give out BBW food items followed by an entourage of a gang of bikers all wearing BBW t-shirts travelling throughout the City announcing the restaurant opening and handing out selected food items, mini-appetizers and promotional flyers to the crowds
- Created a highly successful Grand Opening for the restaurant; invited and hosted VIPS from Muscat Oman, coordinated with franchisee and franchisors, welcomed VIPs from USA and Canada at the airport and escorted all VIPs and special guests throughout the event; taught the staff an entertainment dance for a special show performed during the grand opening; also invited employees from other brands for soft opening
- Awarded by the Headquarters in OH, USA: "Buffalo Wild Wings, stay strong, highest sales, maintained after new restaurant opening (NRO)" presented at the Business Conference, Washington, D.C. in 2018
- Continued to generate sales of 122.7% over expectations by prolonging the honeymoon period for six months; implemented a pager system to minimize the effect of customer wait time with preference over walk-ins
- Drove sales by managing marketing program with a calendar of ideas, activities, themes and special holiday events such as daily karaoke, social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram) activities, darts championships, and celebrations for various social and religious events such as Valentines, Halloween, Eid Al Adha and Thanksgiving
- Created and sustained a customer-focused, performance-driven culture among team members resulting in outstanding customer satisfaction and a high volume of repeat and referral business
- Implemented significant improvements in company operations based on valuable feedback from both staff and customers; encouraged and recognized employee contributions while demonstrating flexibility in understanding differing perspectives and managing productive change

Senior Restaurant Manager - THE CHEESE CAKE FACTORY, Beirut, Lebanon May 2014 – Dec 2016

Played a key leadership role in the soft opening and Grand Opening of the restaurant aimed at creating amazing dining experiences by focusing on culinary and operational excellence paired with warm hospitality to keep guests delighted and coming back; worked in collaboration with a task force from USA; seating capacity of 500

- Headhunted, screened, selected and hired 500 employees in Beirut, including some of the top talent from other restaurants; planned and organized a recruitment blitz consisting of social media, promotional flyers, and job fairs together with on-the-ground headhunting
- Trained and provided staff with exemplary restaurant leadership with a passion for creating amazing dining experiences for guests thus inspiring them to deliver peak level work performance
- Applied the use of the Cheese Cake Factory Quality of Operation Checklists and monitored operations to ensure consistency through keen attention to sauce profile, automated recipe viewer, and product specifications
- Generated an average daily sale of \$20,000 US with a 15% profit from food and beverage
- Attracted a high volume of customers resulting in the implementation of a pager system and a card system to allow for priority seating for waiting guests over walk-in customers
- Completed six months of hands-on practice in Abu Dhabi and Kuwait covering areas such as cheesecake bar, barista, expediting operations, kitchen management, SOPs, salads, and franchise operations

Senior Operations Manager - KOBE REST. - INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL, Lebanon Sep 2009 – Mar 2014

Setup, operated and managed two upscale restaurants from scratch in coordination with the Headquarters in Vietnam, one in Downtown Beirut (seating 150) and the other at the Intercontinental Hotel in the mountains (seating 220)

- Conducted a meticulous feasibility study and gathered critical data to validate the project, scouted and selected ideal locations for the restaurants, and negotiated favourable contracts to secure the facilities
- Worked with architect and construction crews to design, build and apply quality finishings to create an opulent environment with fabulous décor and fantastic colour scheme to convey an ambience of luxury
- Selected specially designed handcrafted dishware and cutlery to serve food of the highest quality (made with luxurious ingredients) with unique and beautiful presentations featuring a dynamic blend of ancient Japanese cuisine with modern New York's culinary trends to deliver a one-of-a-kind dining experience
- Hand-selected, hired and trained the Executive Chef and chefs from other top-level restaurants in Vietnam, participated in menu planning and the creation of superb cocktails based on knowledge of food and beverage trends, seasonal availability of quality products, and costing; also coordinated job fairs to hire other staff
- Administered performance of all service staff; scheduled and evaluated all restaurant operations and provided training to over 100 employees to meet/exceed performance targets while complying with policies & procedures
- Ensured profitability targets were achieved using cost volume-profit analysis while overseeing daily operations and catering service, and implementing production, productivity, quality, and customer-service standards
- Attracted an upscale clientele of VIPs, international tourists, and celebrities by delivering an exquisite palatable New York-Japanese cuisine that combined the timeless art of Teppanyaki-Hibachi grilling and the craft of fresh sushi preparation; voted best Japanese restaurant in Beirut and featured in the Time Out Magazine
- Rated Travellers' Choice: Fine dining on TripAdvisor for providing memorable dining experiences and received personal mentions by name by highly satisfied guests

Restaurant General Manager - CHART HOUSE-LANDRY'S INC., South Carolina, USA Mar 2004 – Apr 2008

Directed, controlled and managed this upscale/fine dining restaurant providing the freshest seafood, succulent steaks and impeccable service amid spectacular views and elegant ambience to maximize sales, profitability and guest satisfaction

- Created and sustained a guest-focused work environment of pride, honesty, integrity and loyalty and implemented innovative training programs designed to strengthen the company's management foundation and motivate employees to achieve their full potential through leadership, focus, intensity and persistence
- Boosted sales by creating a VIP Concierge program that incentivised concierges at various hotels to refer business to the restaurant by offering them cash vouchers to be used to dine at Landry's Restaurant
- Contributed to wonderful bonding experiences for guests while reducing both cost and serving time by developing a family style menu for large parties and groups
- Achieved/exceeded sales and profitability through profit planning with a detailed analysis of the restaurant's past financial performance, market trends, and expected changes in the business environment; creating the roadmap to attain benchmarks; and inspiring and motivating the team of up to 150 employees to drive results
- Successfully managed the \$4 million US property to provide exceptional guest experiences and guarantee total guest satisfaction while maintaining sales, service quality, and restaurant appearance with an average of \$10,000 US net sale per day; also filled-in for other GMs in Fort Lauderdale, FL, Savannah, GA, Weehawken, NJ

Front Office Supervisor - HAMPTON INN (Hilton Family), South Carolina, United States Nov 2002 – Jan 2004
 Managed all aspects of the Front Office including operations, planning, budgeting, staffing, and payroll in accordance with hotel policies and procedures to ensure compliance with Brand and Company standards in all areas

- Maximized occupancy, rate, revenue and guest satisfaction working closely with the Front Office Team, General Manager, and Sales
- Led the hotel to achieve the distinctive 94/100 grade in performance audit by training and developing team members following Hilton training and programs

Hurricane Bar & Grill Manager - MOVENPICK HOTEL, Beirut, Lebanon Jan 2000 – Sep 2002
 Maximized sales revenue by creating new beverage/cocktails to suit guests' needs; up-selling and promoting other food and beverage (F&B) offers at every available opportunity; and conducting regular quality audits of beverage service to maintain high standards, optimize the ability of mixology creation, and drive beverage revenue and cost control

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Certified Trainer – BUFFALO WILD WINGS, CHEESECAKE FACTORY, KOBE & LANDRY'S INC

Hospitality Cross Training - INTERNATIONAL MARRIOTT HOTEL, Lebanon Two Years

- Trained in the kitchen of a world-leading luxury hotel/resort and learned from the best professionals in the hospitality industry in all areas of culinary with chefs across multiple kitchens, front office and food & beverage, FOH, BOH, the secrets of a successful brand, food science, quality control points, maintaining high quality and consistency of food preparation and presentation, sanitation and food safety

Teppanyaki/Hibachi & Food Science of Sushi – KURAMAS RESTAURANT CHAIN, South Carolina, USA

Manager-in-Training (MIT) - BUFFALO WILD WINGS, Riyadh, KSA (the largest location in the world) 2014

Manager-in-Training Program - THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY, Kuwait, Grand Avenue; Dubai, Mall of the Emirates; and Abu Dhabi, Yas Island

Management Training - LANDRY'S RESTAURANTS, CHARLEY'S CRAB, HILTON HEAD, SC, USA

Floor Supervisor Training - LANDRY'S RESTAURANTS, CHARLEY'S CRAB, HILTON HEAD, SC, USA

Internship, Hilton Family Hotels OnQ - HILTON UNIVERSITY, HAMPTON INN, HILTON HEAD, SC, USA

Cross Training Certificate - MOVENPICK HOTEL & RESORT, Beirut, Lebanon

Associate of Science: Hospitality Management – C & E COLLEGE/AMERICAN HOTEL & MOTEL ASSOC.

- Received a Hospitality Management Diploma with specific certifications in: International Hotel Development & Management, Hospitality Sales & Marketing, Food Production Principles, Hospitality Human Resources Management, The Hospitality Industry, Food & Beverage Management, F&B Controls, Front Office Procedures, Housekeeping Management, Hotel/Motel Security Management

High School Diploma - THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL INSTITUTE, Lebanon Jan 1993 – Feb 1996

ADDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

- Japanese, Chinese, Italian and American cuisines, including Teppanyaki, Hibachi, Sushi and the two main variations of okonomiyaki: Kansai-style (also called Osaka-style) and Hiroshima-style
- Language skills: Arabic, English and French with understanding and respect for the many cultures and customs of people around the world, including those various ethno-cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status
- Good knowledge of wines including wine styles, different regions and grapes, aging potential for various wines, and specific flavor profiles with the ability to confidently speak about wine with guests in order to drive sales
- Expert in the use of restaurant automated systems such as Open Table, OnQ, Micros, and Aloha, as well as MS Office Suite; able to learn new technologies quickly