



POST-CONFERENCE PLAYBOOK



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AHF 2024 National Conference

Leading the way in healthcare, senior dining, and hospitality...

We are so honored by all those who chose to join us in San Antonio this August. AHFs 2024 National Conference was focused on a 360 approach to wellness including all aspects of the operation from personal wellbeing, to team mental health, to operational and financial wellness and more. Throughout three days and 15+ critical sessions and events, leaders from across the healthcare, senior dining and hospitality segments came together to share their expertise, learn, and network with one another.

As you may know, AHF spent the last year transforming its image to match the vibrant and innovative spirit of the healthcare and senior dining industry. AHF is proud to represent each of you working to keep the self-operated model the industry gold standard. I hope that this document and the takeaways from this year's conference assist you and your teams as you navigate the coming opportunities and challenges.

AHF DELIVERS STRATEGIC INSIGHTS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Each year AHF surveys its members to track industry trends, challenges, and opportunities for innovation. This is fed into our overarching educational programs - both virtually and in-person. In our 2024 survey, operators told us that their primary challenges continue to be (1) staffing, (2) training, development, and employee engagement/retention, and (3) patient and resident satisfaction.

Operators are facing an increasingly complex set of demands seeking to support their staff, care of patients/residents, and help achieve C-Suite visions. A few things rose to the top when discussing operator focuses:

- Adoption of AI and robotics to streamline and automate tasks
- Digital integration through consolidated reporting
- Sustainability and food waste management
- Labor-saving tools, technologies, and strategies
- Cost management and financial efficiency
- Enhancement of patient/resident satisfaction

Our conference themes and takeaways reflect the diverse challenges and innovations that were explored during the conference, focusing on both operational excellence and patient/resident-centered care. Throughout this document, you will be able to access notes and takeaways for all our sessions. Thank you for your support, expertise and leadership!



Leah Reily, CAE
AHF Executive Director

See you in NOLA!

Top Themes

ADVOCATING FOR SELF-OPERATION

Data-driven KPIs are essential in proving the value of self-operated foodservice models, showcasing better performance in cost, employee retention, and patient satisfaction compared to contract management.

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Supporting mental health for leaders and staff through regular check-ins and wellness programs enhances workplace well-being and reduces stress.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT/RETENTION

Cross-training, career development, and a positive work environment are critical for retaining staff and boosting job satisfaction.

LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

Leaders must prioritize self-care, build resilience, and maintain strategic communication with the C-Suite to navigate challenges and advocate for departmental success.

TECHNOLOGY & AUTOMATION

AI, robotics, and automation can optimize operations, reduce labor costs, and improve service quality, but early IT collaboration and staff training are critical for success.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Addressing diverse dietary needs and cultural preferences through culturally competent foodservice improves patient outcomes and helps prevent malnutrition.

MALNUTRITION INTERVENTION

Collaborative efforts between foodservice and clinical teams, using liberalized diets and the Global Malnutrition Composite Score (GMCS), are vital for improving patient care.

FOOD TRACEABILITY COMPLIANCE

Preparing for the 2026 FDA food traceability rule requires implementing tracking systems, maintaining documentation, and collaborating with suppliers to ensure compliance.

CULINARY INNOVATION

Offering personalized, app-based ordering and unique dining experiences can transform traditional hospital foodservice into something more patient-focused and satisfying.

SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

Reducing food waste, adopting plant-forward menus, and sustainable sourcing are key priorities, with tracking tools aiding in meeting environmental goals.

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MAINSTAGE SESSION RECAP NOTES

Fill Your Cup: Emotional Wellness for Exhausted Leaders

Speakers: Mike Veny (Certified Corporate Wellness Specialist® & Best-Selling Author)

Key Message

Self-care is a fundamental component of overall well-being. While wellness primarily focuses on physical health, well-being encompasses all aspects of a person, including financial, physical, and mental health. The concept of employee well-being has evolved over time, from identifying disease states to implementing supportive measures like reduced work hours and Employee Assistance Programs. In today's increasingly stressful world, especially following the pandemic, leaders can play a crucial role in supporting their employees' well-being by implementing easy-to-use tools and strategies.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

The concept of mental health in the workplace is not new. We can implement two simple programs that will benefit the employees in our organization in managing anxiety and stress. First, we can teach our employees to ask to help them identify stress they may be experiencing, such as “What are you feeling? Where is it located? What do I need right now?” Second, can also help leaders be more cognizant of employees who may be experiencing stress, anxiety, or mental health concerns by looking out for the three “outs”: 1) Are they acting out of character? (lateness, anger, not performing as usual), 2) Are things coming out of nowhere? (change in appearance, sudden life decisions), and 3) Are they out of the group? (isolating, distancing themselves).

Three things you can ask someone who may be struggling:

- How can I support you?
- Help me understand.
- What kind of flexibility do you need?

What Surprised Attendees?

- Gaining a better understanding of some of the technology we use in day-to-day life was interesting. We throw around terms like “trigger” and “burnout” often in our society. They have a stronger meaning than we realize, and we should be careful with what words we use to talk about mental health issues.
- Drumming loudly with 500 people can be very cathartic!



Fill Your Cup: Emotional Wellness for Exhausted Leaders

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- When someone is struggling, ask open-ended questions and pause to allow them to share freely.
- Differentiate between self-care activities that promote well-being and escape activities that may have negative consequences.
- Address emotional stress through techniques like brain dumping, intentional boundaries, sharing secrets, and self-reflection.
- Prioritize yourself through physical and mental well-being. Engage in physical activity and meditation to manage anxiety and calm your body. Make self-care a priority to fill your cup and maintain overall well-being.

“
**Movement is a great antidote
to anxiety, "have a dance
party with yourself!"**
”



FISH Talk 1: Mastering Resilience: Protecting Your Mental Health While Defending Your Operation

Speakers: Anne Phillips (Baptist Health) | Lisa Shoopman (Baptist Health)*

Key Message

It is critical to prioritize self-care and emotional intelligence when managing the stress of defending your self-operated status. A core message was that leaders need to level-set expectations for themselves while accepting that they are not always the decision-makers and that not all outcomes are within their control. Key strategies included focusing on what you can control - your self-care and emotional responses - while communicating facts rather than emotions. The session emphasized resilience, which can be learned and developed, and urged participants to adopt a mindset of storytelling, positioning themselves as narrators rather than characters in difficult situations. Know your value! Leaders were reminded to own their expertise, communicate objectively, and be prepared to encounter challenges, including disrespect while maintaining professionalism and empathy. Decision-makers can make bad decisions.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- It's essential to understand whether a team member needs comfort or solutions. If you cannot provide support at the moment, pause the conversation until you can.
- Everyone should establish "no meeting zones" on their calendar to prioritize their well-being and create time for self-care.
- Self-care is not selfish; maintaining a positive mindset is crucial, with daily practices like gratitude reflections helping to reinforce this.
- Delegation is key—leaders should lean on their experts and share responsibilities to avoid burnout.
- Structured time for both projects and self-care is vital, especially in a hybrid work environment, emphasizing that selflessness without self-care can become counterproductive.

What Surprised Attendees?

- It took Lisa Shoopman and Anne Phillips over 6 years to make it through the full process of defending their self-op status, converting their system to self-op, and getting to their current consolidated system. That is a long time to stay resilient!
- Practicing positive self-talk is critical to help your mental wellness as a leader.



**Lisa was unable to attend in person but contributed greatly to the development of the session.*

FISH Talk 1: Mastering Resilience: Protecting Your Mental Health While Defending Your Operation

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- **Selflessness Can Be Harmful:** Avoid being a martyr by trying to be everything for everyone. Understand that self-care is not selfish (selflessness is selfishness), and you must prioritize your well-being to be effective for others. We can learn to cope, learn to be resilient. We can bounce back from stress and adversity.
- **Prepare for Adversity:** Accept that you are not always the decision-maker, and be prepared to face disrespect. Focus on resilience, communicating with facts rather than emotions, and practicing strong emotional intelligence.
- **Build a Support Network:** Create a trusted inner circle where you can express your feelings and frustrations. Find experts on your team or with AHF to help you. Take a "five-minute funeral" to release your feelings and emotions with a trusted inner circle before moving on. Ask yourself:
 - Are you seeking comfort or solutions?
 - Does it need to be done now?
 - Does it need to be done by me?
- **Manage Your Energy:** Regularly block off time on your calendar for self-care, lunch, or important tasks, and delegate when necessary. Taking a "complaint vacation" and staying positive helps maintain a healthy mindset.
- **Resilience is a Skill:** The ability to bounce back from stress and adversity can be learned, practiced, and developed. Visualize challenges, set realistic expectations, and maintain a positive outlook by focusing on what you're grateful for.

“
Does it need to be said?
Does it need to be said now?
By me?
”

FISH Talk 2: Mental Health, Wellness, and Recovery in Hospitality

Speakers: Chef Jasmin Parks-Papadopoulos (CHOW)

Key Message

There is a critical need for mental health support in the industry. While chefs often receive the spotlight, the broader human experience across hospitality is often overlooked. CHOW (Culinary Hospitality Outreach and Wellness) was introduced as a valuable free resource for addressing challenges within teams. Key contributing factors to poor mental health in the field include high stress and long hours. Foodservice is the number one field for substance abuse and suicide risk. The session also focuses on translating the soft skills of hospitality—such as empathy, communication, and care—to foster wellness within oneself, peers, and the entire team.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- We have to bring forth awareness of the essential need for mental wellness support across our teams.
- It can be incredibly lonely as a leader with few outlets. We must be effective, follow-through and deliver on expectations
- What does it look like to take care of yourself? Leaders need to model healthy behaviors
- Many leaders neglect regular check-ins with their teams because it's not always convenient, a practice that must be rethought and integrated into everyday leadership to prioritize well-being.

What Surprised Attendees?

- There is a \$4 rate of return for every dollar spent on providing mental health support.
- There are perceived consequences for utilizing Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits.

Key Takeaways

- **Prioritize Self-Care and Vulnerability:** Leaders must first take care of themselves and practice wellness skills during their off time. Embrace vulnerability to foster a supportive environment where the team feels comfortable being open.
- **Utilize Resources and Tools:** Explore the CHOW toolkit (<https://chowco.org/get-involved/#wellness-toolkit-1>) and other workplace wellness resources to help navigate mental health challenges and promote team well-being.
- **Be Aware of Injuries We Can't See:** Stay mindful of unseen challenges your team may face, and check in with them when you have the bandwidth, allowing for genuine and supportive follow-up.
- **TACO - Take in, Accept, Condense, Opportunity.** If you do not have the bandwidth, check in when you do, do not force it. Take the opportunity to follow-up. Its ok to be vulnerable with your team; allowing them to be vulnerable and giving permission to do the same.

FISH Talk 3: Immersive Leadership: Enhancing Team Productivity and Well-Being through Empathy and Technology

Speakers: Jess Legge (Sifted)

Key Message

This session focused on the importance of role immersion for all team members. Leaders were encouraged to experience different roles to foster peer-to-peer understanding and build rapport. This approach helps leaders develop greater empathy by truly understanding the day-to-day challenges their teams face. The session also highlighted the need to create meaningful ways for teams to communicate, emphasizing the importance of connection in the workplace. Additionally, it stressed the value of using technology to handle routine tasks, freeing up employees to focus on tasks that require human connection and creativity, ultimately enhancing both productivity and the overall experience. Leadership should do more than just implement and enforce a process.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- Leaders need the flexibility and support to practice immersive leadership, working alongside their teams “in the trenches” to understand their daily experiences. However, leaders should be observing and experiencing, not necessarily doing the employee’s work for them.
- Hosting regular “office hours” creates an open channel for team members to share ideas, voice concerns, and seek help, fostering a supportive environment.
- Staying proactive and ahead of industry trends is crucial for both clients and team success.

What Surprised Attendees?

- Consider creating a daily (or regular) survey to identify trends that are affecting your team. Gathering data will help you check in and reflect. Want to avoid finding out about issues too late.
- Leverage technology and have your people only do those tasks that humans can do. Human connection is key.



FISH Talk 3: Immersive Leadership: Enhancing Team Productivity and Well-Being through Empathy and Technology

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- **Create Intentional Moments:** Create meaningful communication. Host "office hours," and establish daily feedback channels like shift reports to identify trends and improve the organization.
- **Role Immersion and Cross-Training:** Engage all team members, including leaders, in role immersion and cross-training to build understanding and empathy for peers' roles.
- **Leverage Technology:** Allow technology to handle tasks humans can't, and consider adopting tech solutions from other industries to incorporate into your operation.
- **Remove Friction to Improve Team Happiness:** Remove barriers and inefficiencies to improve team happiness and productivity.
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Be practical with expectations and ensure the team's well-being is built into operational programs.

“
Scale helpfulness. Remove
friction and improve
happiness.”

Cultural Competence and Heritage Cuisine for Foodservice Professionals

Speakers: Danielle Kronmuller, DHSc, RDN (West Chester University) | John J Hudak Jr., CEC, AAC (Geisinger) | Emily Black MS, RD, LDN (Geisinger)

Key Message

Cultural competence should be a priority for patient care and experience within healthcare foodservice, especially given the increasing diversity of the U.S. population. By understanding and addressing the cultural needs of patients, we can improve patient care and experience. The cultural wheel provides a framework for defining cultural competence, while recognizing its ongoing nature. As the U.S. shifts from a white majority to a minority by 2060, it is imperative to adapt healthcare food services to cater to all cultures.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

Cultural competence leads to better patient outcomes and has an added value in preventing hospitalized malnutrition in patients. Having this understanding will also help the operation to meet regulatory requirements for cultural food preferences.

What Surprised Attendees?

- You likely have groups already within your organization on staff that can help you celebrate food from different cultures you might not be familiar with. Think creatively about to involve various members of your team to help your department become more culturally competent.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural competence can help prevent hospital malnutrition.
- Cultural competence enhances communication, builds trust, and improves patient compliance, mental health, and wellness.
- Recognize that culture is constantly evolving and individuals may belong to multiple cultures.
- Treat all individuals with respect, regardless of background, and leverage the expertise of others.
- Strive to implement changes based on cultural needs to provide the best care for all patients, regardless of their characteristics.

Not everyone in a culture eats the same. They have preferences that you need to ask to understand.

The Leading Edge: Trends and Innovations from Across the Hospitality Industry

Speakers: Jessica Shelly (Cincinnati Public Schools) | Matthew Ward (University of North Texas Dining Services) | Chris Masker (JW Marriott) | Joe Carbonara (Zoomba Group) - Moderator

Key Message

The session explored the evolving concept of hospitality and its integration into modern foodservice across diverse industries. Panelists discussed how hospitality has shifted from focusing on speed and efficiency to creating personalized, emotional connections with customers. They shared insights into how consumer expectations have risen, requiring a higher level of service, customization, and cultural inclusivity. Technology also emerged as a key factor in meeting these expectations, from menu management systems in schools and universities to QR codes for hotel room service. The panel highlighted the importance of drawing inspiration from other industries, emphasizing the need for innovation, sustainability, and adaptability in meal services beyond traditional times.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- Customers across all sectors—hotels, schools, universities—now expect higher-quality food, customized service, and experiences that justify the cost, a trend equally relevant in healthcare foodservice.
- There's an increasing demand for culturally diverse dining options, something that is being shown in all sectors.
- Foodservice operators must extend meal service beyond traditional times, incorporating snack offerings, late-night options, and "grab-and-go" choices to meet evolving customer needs.
- Technology plays a crucial role in improving operations, from menu management and food allergy tracking in schools to QR codes for room service in hotels, offering both operational efficiency and enhanced customer experience.
- Speaker Chris Masker from the JW Marriott noted that they are using data and guest preferences to create personalized dining experiences, focusing on how food makes customers feel, rather than just the speed of service.
- Sustainable practices, including plant-based options, are increasingly important, especially in universities, where students are engaged and expect eco-friendly dining solutions.
- In schools, addressing food insecurity has become a priority.
- New initiatives in foodservice, whether introducing a hydroponic farm or adding advanced technology, require a clear ROI and alignment with both internal goals and external benefits, such as recruitment or customer satisfaction.

The Leading Edge: Trends and Innovations from Across the Hospitality Industry

[Continued]

What Surprised Attendees?

- Laws are being passed in K-12 banning cell phones which was surprising and refreshing.
- It was unexpected to hear that Chef Matt from the University of North Texas doesn't allow to-go food from his dining halls. Instead, the customers can take food away from retail and market place operations. It's interesting to consider if this would alleviate any pain points if customers weren't able to grab food to-go from a cafeteria, for instance.
- Learning about some of the technology being used in a hotel setting, like QR codes and retrieval devices for room service was interesting.

Key Takeaways

- Focus on food allergies and dietary needs in schools highlights the importance of personalized care in healthcare foodservice, ensuring patient safety through tailored meals and clear communication.
- Schools are shifting to customizable, fresh-made meals, a trend healthcare can follow to provide nutritious, appetizing options that support recovery and wellness.
- Schools' use of sustainable practices and tech integration can inspire healthcare to adopt local sourcing, reduce waste, and use technology for efficient meal planning and patient care.
- Speed, costs, and efficiency used to dictate many facets of foodservice regardless of the industry, but nowadays focusing on how food is making the person eating it feel and creating a customized experience is becoming more and more a priority.
- Now more than ever, budgets are being scrutinized in all areas of the foodservice industry. In order to develop new initiatives, understanding and communicating the ROI and having clear internal and external benefits are essential.



Managing Up: Insights, Needs, and Forecasts from the C-Suite in Healthcare and Senior Dining

Speakers: Mike Williams (Twenty20 Management) | Frank Sawyer (Trinity Health Oakland) | Eric Eisenberg (IQinary Consulting) - Moderator

Key Message

Engage with your C-Suite on a regular basis and provide:

1. Information about your operation.
2. What is working well, but also what your challenges are.
3. Solutions you have to address and what resources you might need to bring to fix/solve.
4. Staff outreach for sourcing new employees, you need to be your own salesperson to find talent at all levels.
5. Make friends inside the C-Suite on a personal level.
6. Creating a department “brand image” can help the facility.
7. Retail facing locations can help the facility's image overall.
8. Bring fun to the environment!
9. It's a people game, relationships matter.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

Session speakers described the need for the C-Suite to lead from both three (3) feet and 30,000 feet. It's important for operators to meet administrators at the 30,000 foot level oftentimes.

Operators were encouraged to show them the issues, and challenges, and how they have addressed them. Elevate your conversation to strategy. Remind them how much foodservice has a strategic impact on the patient, family, and staff, so it's important for you/your department to have a seat at the table.

On the other hand, it's also important for leaders to interact with staff at three foot level to be in touch with what's really going on. This interaction can reveal more about the needs. For senior dining especially, residents spend about 80-90% of their time in the community. Food is a big part of that and restaurant components need to be up to date. Have a strategy for the future and for your resident community or hospital's identity.

What Surprised Attendees?

- The C-Suite does recognize that the caliber of the workforce, salary requirements, and everything else have shifted and that operators are working at a deficient level with staffing and budgets, especially post-pandemic.

Managing Up: Insights, Needs, and Forecasts from the C-Suite in Healthcare and Senior Dining

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- **Food is a feeling.** How do we spread that through the hospital/community and its strategy? Leaning into the message gets to your C-Suite. That helps show what you need and what your hopes and dreams are so they can be an advocate for you.
- Leverage your **strategic thinking** and **needs** in your conversations with the C-Suite.
- Balance the needs of the caregiver, patient, and resident vs. the budget and systems of the facility/organization. How do we avoid the conflict of these situations?
- Please don't assume the C-Suite knows your information or needs. Communicate to them. They are oftentimes very far removed from the day-to-day.
- Present information in alignment with your organizations scorecard or mission standards (e.g., Employee, Patient, Performance, and Quality). That will help you close the gap and speak the same language. Bring needs and ideas that speak to one or more of those standards and now you're speaking the same language.
- Feel empowered to bring the C-Suite the problems but they want to hear a solution, and it may not be THE solution but can be a resource to the C-Suite.
- Grow revenue, and sell more! On the cost side, always try to find the best product at the best prices. Review and know the whole financials of the full P/L. Are they carrying the right weight of the organization's finances and should they shift to other departments?
- Revenue grows the company, and cost keeps the company alive. However, the restaurants in the senior living community are not viewed as a cost center, but a needed amenity.



“
If you don't make mistakes,
I don't know how you grow.
”

AI, Robotics, and Technology in Healthcare and Senior Dining Foodservice

Speakers: Brandon Scott (Mashgin) | Erica Salgado (BayCare Health System)* | Chad Nurminen (Essentia Health) | Christine Guyott (Rippe Associates) Moderator

Key Message

The integration of AI and robotics can greatly enhance efficiency and service quality by optimizing existing labor rather than replacing it. However, success depends on clearly identifying objectives, KPIs, and aligning technology adoption with long-term organizational goals. This requires early collaboration with IT, taking time to educate both staff and customers, and ensuring all stakeholders are involved in order to maximize ROI and.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

It was clear from hearing from the panelists that engaging with IT from the outset helps to address potential technical challenges like connectivity issues, ensuring a smooth deployment and operation of systems like robotics and self-checkout kiosks. Automation has the potential to reduce labor costs, increase throughput, and enhance service availability, such as supporting 24-hour operations with fewer staff. These benefits highlight the potential ROI and strategic value in investing in these new technologies.

What Surprised Attendees?

- Implementation of robotics and AI affects a variety of departments. Be aware of this, explain the “why” of the initiative and get their input. It will make implementation easier.
- How much faster healthcare technology is moving from prior years. It is exciting to see that level of progress and growth.

Key Takeaways

- Early and continuous IT involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of new technology in order to ensure system integration and Wi-Fi connectivity.
- Focus on how automation can free staff from non-value-added tasks. Ensuring customers have clear, simple materials to ease their transition.
- Propose new technologies with a well-defined business case that highlights ROI, labor savings, and alignment with long-term organizational goals, utilizing internal resources to ensure sustainable growth.
- Understand the physical space requirements for robotics, including the need for wider hallways, docking space, and vertical transportation.
- Ask detailed questions about AI technologies, including their functions, implementation process, system integration, operator requirements, and aftermarket support, to ensure a successful deployment.

**On site Jonathan Layton presented in Erica's stead due to illness.*

Unlocking the Power of Time to Maximize Growth & Performance

Speakers: Julie Jones, MS, RDN, LD, CPTD (Ruck-Shockey Associates)

Key Message

We've lost the ability to be intentional with our time, but tools like those AHF offers can help regain control. While we can prioritize time, we can't truly manage it. Quick wins may get recognition, but high-impact work requires planning and effort - focus on work that matters. To improve time management, identify what hinders team efficiency, be selective with tasks, and know when to delegate or eliminate them.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

Time is our most valuable resource, and improving time management is key to building a more productive team. Utilize AHF tools to enhance efficiency, understand your team's time awareness, and identify what disrupts it to evolve toward better time management.

What Surprised Attendees?

- Everyone, at every level of an organization, struggles with time management.
- From a poll taken during the session, the majority of attendees identified interruption as the main cause for not being efficient with their time. Managing employee needs was the next highest driver.

Key Takeaways

- Three types of “Time Accounts”
 - **Checking:** This is how you consume time for everyday activities. Do what we need to do.
 - **Savings:** Block your calendar time
 - **401K:** Investment strategy, where can I gather resources to do this work or set aside time to do the strategy? This is adaptive work.
- Use tools like the Eisenhower Matrix or the Action Priority Matrix to help you prioritize tasks and activities on what gets you to outcomes more effectively.
- There are 6 B's of talent management: Build - Buy - Borrow - Bind - Boost - Bounce. Performance is a team sport.
- Don't lose sight of the impact and importance of big work, make time to think.
- Refueling is important. Prioritize your time, if you are not at your best you are not effective.
- Do, Schedule, Delegate, Delete to plan work based on importance and urgency
- AHF has 1,400 resources to bind, boost, build, buy, and borrow from to help your organization, and your time more effective.

Unlocking the Power of Time to Maximize Growth & Performance

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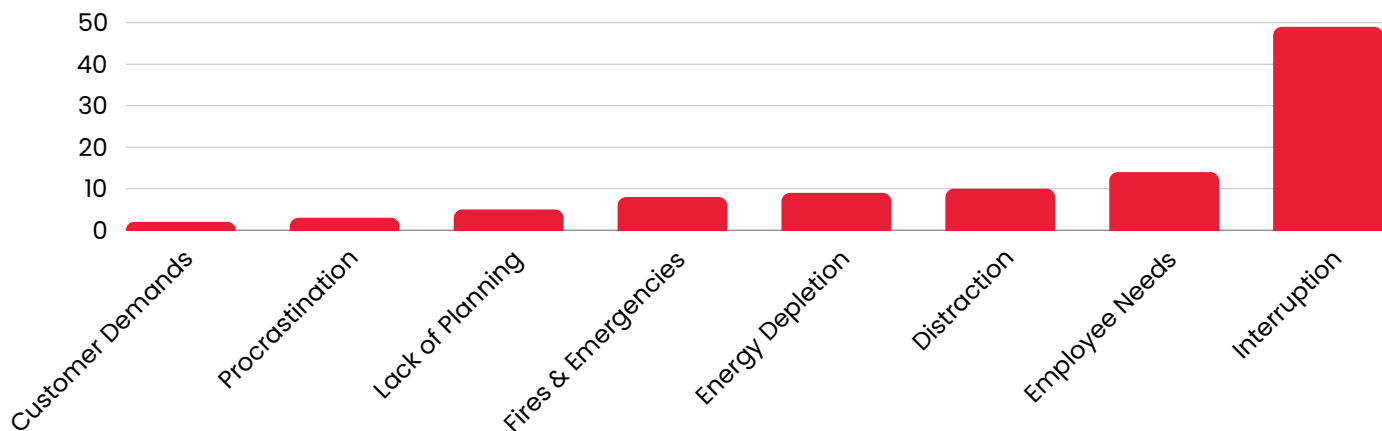
“
We are in a time famine.
Impact and effort should be
where you spend your time.
”

Download the Handouts

- [Action Priority Matrix Handout](#)
- [Eisenhower Matrix Handout](#)
- [Meeting Agenda with Personalized Learning Plan Master Handout](#)
- [Time Prioritization Framework Handout](#)

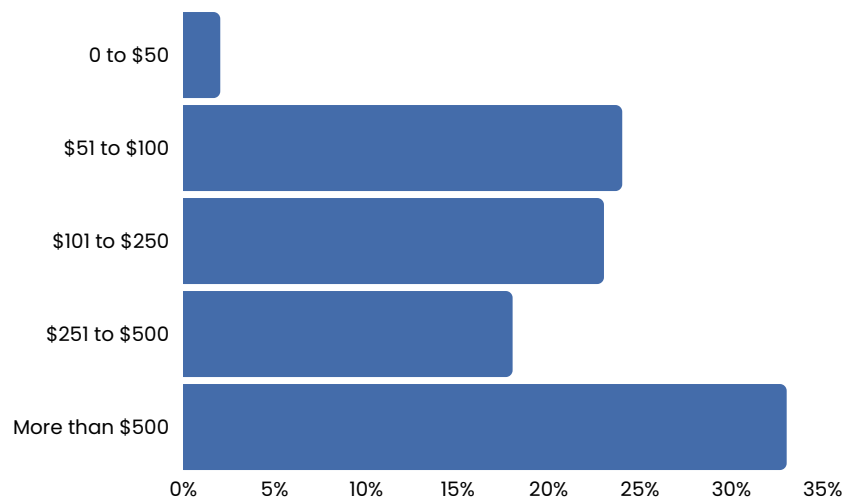
What makes it hard to be efficient with your time?

The audience was asked to rank what made it hardest to be most efficient with their time. The majority of attendees noted interruption as the #1 thing that impacted their efficiency.



Value of an Hour?

The audience was asked to value one hour of their time. The results can be seen to the right.



PRE-CONFERENCE DEEP DIVE SESSION RECAP NOTES

The Food Traceability Rule Is Coming – Is Your Team Prepared?

Speakers: Sara Aranda (Gordon Food Service) | Jared Keefer, MPH, RS (DMA) | Ceret Leyva (Ben E. Keith)

Key Message

The new FDA Food Traceability rule, starting in January 2026, will apply to all food service operations. Audits will be conducted by local health departments and state inspectors to manage food outbreaks. This will be done through better tracking systems, including documentation of lot numbers and food production details. Food service suppliers and distributors must implement systems to track Key Data Elements (KDEs) throughout the supply chain, from shipping to receiving and transformation. Broadline distributors will play a crucial role in providing necessary tracking information, and the adoption of FSMA will significantly impact operations. Some exemptions exist, and more details can be found on the FDA website.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- Teams need to prepare for FDA's new food traceability regulations, including evaluating management scope and potential costs.
- FSMA 204 aims to detect foodborne illnesses and speed up response times.
- A new list of acronyms will be introduced for tracking processes.
- Tracking transformation of products is essential, with the "Kill Step" (cooking) stopping the tracking process.
- Operators must develop a written plan and have a designated team in place.
- Product identification, traceability, recall strategies, and notifications are required.
- Documentation, record-keeping, and post-recall procedures, including effectiveness checks, are necessary.
- Root Cause Analysis (RCA) must be part of the process for handling recalls.

What Surprised Attendees?

- The new FDA regulation is 600 pages long, introducing numerous acronyms and new documentation processes for foodservice operators to manage.
- If a supplier/distributor does not provide a lot number, the food operator must generate one, increasing their responsibility and oversight.
- The regulation primarily impacts fresh products like produce, soft cheeses, and shellfish, with frozen items excluded; small farms are exempt, but facilities are still accountable.
- FDA revises the list of regulated items every two years, potentially adding costs and requiring operational adjustments.
- The 10-step checklist is extensive, requiring customization for each operation and placing significant accountability on foodservice operators.

The Food Traceability Rule Is Coming – Is Your Team Prepared?

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- The FDA food traceability rule rollout begins in January 2026, with compliance required for manufactured, packed, processed, and held foods, and exemptions for USDA-regulated items and foods with a cook/kill step.
- Facilities must decide how to collect data (paper/digital, per site) and ensure a system is in place to track shipping, receiving, and production processes.
- Traceability lot codes (TLC) will be defined by the manufacturing community, with the FDA setting requirements but not the exact methods for generating them.
- Critical Tracking Events (CTEs) occur at key supply chain points (shipping, receiving, transformation), and operators are responsible for maintaining traceability data.
- Broadline distributors will play a crucial role in providing traceability information, and operators are encouraged to use GS1 as a starting point and consider product lifecycle management software.
- Overview of traceability plan checklist:
 - 1) Written traceability plan
 - 2) Recall team and recall coordinator
 - 3) Product identification and traceability
 - 4) Recall strategy
 - 5) Notification
 - 6) Disposition of product
 - 7) Documentation and record keeping
 - 8) Root cause analysis
 - 9) Post recall procedures
 - 10) Effectiveness checks

“
Previously a lot of you have
not been regulated by the FDA,
so welcome to the club!
”



Unleash Your Leadership Potential with DISC Pro Training

Speakers: Laura Gible (Clark Food Service Equipment)

Key Message/Purpose of the Session

People have different styles and ways of navigating life, so it's important to understand both yourself and those around you in order to adapt effectively. The DiSC profile focuses on how individuals respond to life's pace and information, and there are no negative scores. The key is using this understanding to improve personal and workplace experiences. Understanding DiSC is not about labeling people, but about appreciating the diversity of styles that drive human behavior. It's a tool to foster empathy, improve communication, and build stronger, more effective teams."

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

Understanding how we can use DiSC to reframe our approach and communication to get the results that we want. In addition to that, understanding what drives you is an important step in understanding your priorities.

Key Takeaways

- The DISC model categorizes individuals into four primary styles: Dominance (D), Influence (I), Steadiness (S), and Conscientiousness (C). Each style represents a different set of behavioral preferences, including how people approach tasks, make decisions, communicate, and react to situations. Understanding your DiSC profile helps you gain self-awareness about your natural tendencies and how they impact your interactions with others.
- Leveraging complementary styles is an important consideration for successful teams. Also stretching into traits and behaviors that don't come naturally.
- You can get a sense of pace by body tone and voice inflection. This is a key social cue to understand a person's DiSC style.
- DiSC assessments are valuable tools for personal and professional growth. By identifying your strengths and areas for improvement, you can develop strategies to enhance your effectiveness in various settings.
- Recognizing the DiSC styles of others is crucial for improving communication and collaboration. Each style has unique needs and motivations, and adapting your approach to align with these preferences can enhance understanding and reduce conflicts.

**Treat others the way THEY
want to be treated -
Platinum rule**

CONCURRENT SESSIONS SESSION RECAP NOTES

Take the Lead to STOP Malnutrition in Hospitalized Patients

Speakers: Christine Hartney, MS, RDN, FAND (RUSH University Medical Center) | Erica Block MS, RDN (RUSH University Medical Center)

Key Message

Collaboration between food service operations and clinical dietitians to improve malnutrition interventions is critical. Collaboration can make a meaningful impact towards malnutrition interventions for hospitalized patients. A "real food first" approach, alongside the liberalization of diet orders, was emphasized to enhance patient satisfaction and intake, especially in patients with compromised appetites and weight loss. The Global Malnutrition Composite Score (GMCS), a CMS electronic health measure (eCQM), was introduced as a tool for evaluating nutrition care quality. Participants were encouraged to collaborate with quality improvement specialists to adopt GMCS, supporting patient-centered care and improving documentation efficiency for dietitians.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- Demonstrate quality improvement measures to liberalize diet orders and measurements related to how this positively impacts meal consumption and therein meal satisfaction of hospitalized patients.
- Introduction to GMCS and the opportunity to adopt this as an eCQM for 2025 or the following year.
- It's critical to discuss with the C-Suite and show them how this work helps the hospital administrator further their success in achieving the goals they are being held accountable to.
- Epic only got the ability to calculate GMCS (Global Malnutrition Composite Score) in June, however, the calculation still requires a build at the local level in your EMR (Electronic Medical Record).

What Surprised Attendees?

- Liberalized diet orders, malnutrition identification, and GMCS implementation are interconnected in promoting patient-centered care.
- Rush formalized diet order liberalization through Medical Executive approval, expanding menu options while maintaining clear parameters.
- Some organizations found building GMCS data points in Epic challenging, though others experienced smoother processes due to more prescriptive guidelines from the Academy and CMS.
- Contract companies often sell diagnosis and coding services to hospital C-Suite leaders as a strategy.
- CMS will increase required clinical quality measures (CQMs) from 6 (3 required and 3 selected by the organization) to 11, with GMCS's age threshold changing from ≥ 65 to ≥ 18 in January 2026.

Take the Lead to STOP Malnutrition in Hospitalized Patients

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- Malnutrition identification and intervention are critical, long-term priorities for Food and Nutrition Services (FANS) departments.
- Talking to your organization's accreditation and quality improvement committees about adding GMCS (Global Malnutrition Composite Score) as one of your organization's quality measures can be a win-win, by helping meet a CMS requirement and putting malnutrition in the spotlight.
- GMCS is the first nutrition-related eCQM, underscoring the registered dietitian's importance as a key member of the healthcare team.
- Liberalizing diet orders improves clinical outcomes by allowing patients to eat more, and avoiding unnecessary food restrictions. Find a physician champion if you are looking to liberalize diets
- Empowering dietitians to liberalize diets and collaborate with providers is essential for patient care.
- Engaging patient food service teams to improve tray accuracy, temperature, and culturally appropriate options can help manage malnutrition effectively.

**Anyone can be malnourished,
including someone
considered obese**

Creating a Culinary Experience Beyond the Traditional Hospital Cafeteria Experience

Speakers: Lisette Coston, RD/LD, MBA (Saint Francis Health System) | Kim Alp, RD/LD, MBA (Saint Francis Health System)

Key Message

The successful transformation of a foodservice operation necessitates a comprehensive approach involving experts from various fields. A thorough plan is crucial, and hiring experienced professionals can provide invaluable guidance. Anticipating potential setbacks and involving frontline staff in the process are essential. While the transformation may be lengthy and involve changes, maintaining a clear focus on the organization's goals and objectives is vital to ensure a successful outcome.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

To create a top-tier hospitality experience, it's essential to draw inspiration from diverse foodservice segments beyond healthcare. This includes implementing features like various dining sections, accommodating both solo and group dining with unique experiences, and offering mobile app services during slower hours. Additionally, ensuring the C-Suite is well-aligned and their needs are met is crucial. Understanding their preferences and conducting site visits can help tailor the hospitality experience to their specific requirements. Create a different dining sections, places where diners can eat along, or in groups, and have different experiences.

What Surprised Attendees?

- Ended up designing a space that required more labor than before.
- Speakers were able to get renovation funding twice within just a few years.
- The site uses an ordering app to feed employees and guests outside of normal business hours.

Key Takeaways

- **C-Suite alignment:** Align with C-Suite ideas to secure support and involve them in the design process, understanding their preferences and budget implications. Including a C-Suite idea can win needed support. It's their space too.
- **Phased approach:** Break down large projects into multiple phases for better manageability.
- **Adaptability:** Be prepared to re-pitch the project if circumstances change, such as cost overruns or leadership changes.
- **Expert involvement:** Hire experts for redesign and involve IT early in the process.
- **Future-focused design:** Consider long-lasting trends and employ experts in interior and equipment design for optimal outcomes.

“
The renovation completely
flipped the historical impression
of a hospital cafeteria
”

Life Launch: Amplify Engagement and Help Employees Dream Big

Speakers: Randy Davis (NMC Health) | Anthony Baffo, PhD, CDM, CFPP (Plymouth Harbor on Sarasota Bay)

Key Message

Employee satisfaction is key to a positive work environment. Employee engagement increases dramatically when the daily experiences of employees include positive relationships with their leaders. Job satisfaction is framed around employee's personal happiness, content gratification by their work, and a pleasant environment to work in. Strategies to improve retention include: 1) offering competitive wages/benefits, 2) improved work environment (culture), 3) career developments opportunities, 4) second chance rehires, 5) cross training employees, and 6) embrace a culture of teach and learn.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

[Project Search](#) can be a great way to find and engage new employees that are trying to acclimate to the workplace. Check out [this video](#) about Project Search.

What Surprised Attendees?

- Employee satisfaction does not always mean employees are satisfied in their jobs. Some of them may be just getting by as they are not growing in their positions or seeking something new such as new responsibilities or career position growth.

Key Takeaways

- **Conduct Stay Interviews:** Use stay interviews to understand employee goals, desires, and how to enhance their work experience.
- **Align Goals and Involve Employees:** Align employees' goals with department objectives and involve them in decision-making processes.
- **Explore Development Programs:** Investigate programs like Life Launch and Project Search to support employee growth and satisfaction.
- **Leadership Accountability:** Recognize that employee engagement doesn't always equate to job satisfaction; leadership should be accountable for employee retention.
- **Focus on Individualized Support:** Rethink employee selection, provide individualized surveys and check-ins, and focus on being a strength-seeking manager to boost employee morale and job satisfaction.

Cultural & Technological Trends in Senior Dining: Resident Choice, Budgets, and More!

Speakers: Dr. Milton L. McGowian CDM, CFPP, MCP, FMP (The Sharon at SouthPark) | Rosemary Aho CDM, CFPP (Marquette County Medical Care Facility)

Key Message

The industry is undergoing significant transformation. To meet evolving resident expectations and remain competitive, operators must adopt innovative approaches. This includes embracing automation and technology, offering diverse dining options, and providing staff and residents with choices. By staying ahead of industry trends and focusing on resident satisfaction, operators can effectively navigate the multi-generational gap and ensure long-term success.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

It's always important to evaluate the local community demographics of both the residents and staff, explore all possible innovations and to get creative to respond to the ever-changing dynamics of your operation. A few ideas speakers suggested included considering things like:

- Back-lit rechargeable menus
- Voice activated or digital menu ordering solutions
- Local restaurant partnering/renting out retail space as part of your community
- Delivering meals from your community restaurant to the larger community outside of residents through a third-party delivery app systems.

What Surprised Attendees?

- The level of interest from the local community in ordering from the onsite community restaurants through meal delivery services to provide additional revenue (and positive marketing).
- Learning about how senior living residents are becoming more and more tech savvy.

Key Takeaways

- Start with smaller implementations like QR codes and virtual cooking classes before exploring robotics and smart appliances.
- Explore grants to support technology investments and become a community leader in innovation.
- Explore options like local food influences, personalized nutrition, alternative delivery, and pop-up events to enhance offerings.
- Offer innovation, automation, or enhanced choices to improve dignity and positive outcomes for both staff and residents.
- Focus on providing high-quality meal options and explore innovative dining and menu options using technology.
- Don't worry about the past, operate and innovate in the new world!

Build Your Strategy to Keep Contract Management Out of Your Operations

Speakers: Roberta Schneider, MS, RD, LD (Texas Health Dallas) | Jody Bias Travis, MHA, MBA, RD, LF, LASSBB (Texas Health Dallas) | Toni Watkins, MS, RD (Riverside Health System) – Moderator

Key Message

A change in leadership can threaten your department's self-operated status, but proactive strategies can help secure continued success. Regularly report on key performance indicators (KPIs) valued by your organization to demonstrate your department's value. Building strong relationships with leadership and finding allies within the team are crucial. Be prepared to advocate for keeping your department self-operated by using data to back up your performance, leveraging resources from AHF, GPO, and distributors. Stay informed about potential contractor involvement, as they may ultimately increase costs for the hospital.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

To effectively communicate your department's value, focus on the KPIs that matter most to your C-Suite and report your progress regularly. Prepare a concise, five-minute elevator pitch to share your department's successes, emphasizing the benefits of staying self-operated. When speaking with administrators, keep your message short, focused on key KPIs, and avoid overwhelming them with data. Use opportunities to advocate for your department, leverage your GPO, and ensure data is easily comparable across the system.

What Surprised Attendees?

The power of data was very clear during this session. Despite the challenges faced at the speaker's facility, by using data provided by internal reporting, their GPO and their distributor, they were able to demonstrate how their KPI performance for Revenue, Patient Satisfaction, and Turnover outperformed the three management companies operating within their system today. This helped make the case to remain self-operated. Additionally, they were able to get a capital investment for a cafeteria remodeling project at the same time.



Build Your Strategy to Keep Contract Management Out of Your Operations

[Continued]

Key Takeaways

- Use the resources available with AHF, your GPO, and your food distributor to help you tell your story.
- If you are working in a system with contracted and self-operated locations, pull your KPI's to illustrate how the entire system is performing to provide a system view. Highlight situations where the contract management is not willing to share the data.
- Measure patient satisfaction data and turnover rates. Your GPO will likely be able to provide data to help compare against similarly sized hospitals.
- Maintain a positive relationship with your leadership, GPO partner, and food distributor. Bring your GPO and distributor onsite when possible and attend their meetings to gain insights and knowledge.
- Some benefits of staying self-operated include:
 - Transparency
 - Decreased food costs with improved purchasing controls
 - Better GPO Contract Utilization (CMA)
 - Greater rebates to the hospital
 - Decreased Turnover
 - Improved Employee Engagement



We have to advertise anything that we are doing well.

Utilize the other departments to help be your voice.

Maximizing GPO Financial Incentives

Speakers: Eric Wilkinson, RDN, MBA (Intermountain Healthcare) | Alex Govern, CDM, CFPP (Intermountain Healthcare) | Parker Schultz (Intermountain Healthcare)

Key Message

By closely collaborating with their broadline distributor and the GPO, the speakers optimized contracts and streamlined product selections, cutting costs while maintaining nutrition standards. Key strategies included locking order guides, which allowed for cost control while providing some menu flexibility, and engaging teams in understanding contract optimization. Their efforts led to a dramatic increase in compliance incentives, from 50% to 105%, for the third quarter of 2023. Despite ongoing challenges, their process offers valuable insights for both large and small operations looking to maximize GPO incentives and achieve financial savings. GPO compliance takes continuous work to stay compliant.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

- Locked order guides are essential.
- Important to give some flexibility to menus, all facilities must choose from the order guide and it is something they monitor closely to save on costs.
- Standardized menus coordinated with patient menu and retail are essential.
- Top line explanation to your teams to “bring them along” in the understanding of contract optimization.

What Surprised Attendees?

- It would be easy to spend more money on labor managing the program than earning in rebates. Careful coordination should prevent that from happening.

Key Takeaways

- Analyze your current purchases to identify matches within your GPO, group them by category, and switch where needed.
- Lock down the order guide.
- Involve staff in change decisions, align your committees and stakeholders.
- Understanding the fine details is essential to maximize opportunities.
- Work to strike a menu balance between consistency and encouraging creativity/quality.

Greening the Plate: Navigating Sustainability for Foodservice Success

Speakers: Helen Wirth, RDN (Kestgo)

Key Message

The climate crisis is the single greatest public health challenge of the 21st Century. About a third of the food is wasted on the planet, mainly from the U.S. There are many levels to how to better our operations to help with climate change and human health through sustainability efforts. The four sustainable efforts that this seminar focused on were: sustainable sourcing, food waste management, menu mix, and marketing/education. The Joint Commission and other organizations look favorably on management of these points in the foodservice operations.

Insights, Innovations, and Themes

Reduction of plastics and a strong plant forward program is important. Focusing on sustainability is a culture change that should be managed and promoted appropriately. The team needs to be involved and accountable for goals. Broadliners are usually able to help track sustainable purchasing options and can share this information with customers to make the process easier.

What Surprised Attendees?

- There are many factors affecting food availability such as air pollution, severe weather, tainted water, supplies, etc.
- A sustainability program is not as hard as you think to build.

Key Takeaways

Where to start when managing a food waste plan?

- Create a plan/baseline and tracking system.
- Develop documentation systems and a policy for what you wish to track.
- Ensure this is a visible effort to your team.
- Ensure you have other champions within your department/organization (support).
- Tack cost reductions and other "wins."
- Ensure that you share your story with others.

Ensure you have a value based procurement system. Instill in the food service team that just because the product is lower does not mean it is a value-based product (i.e. organics). Look at the larger picture and the downstream effects of quality for your customers.

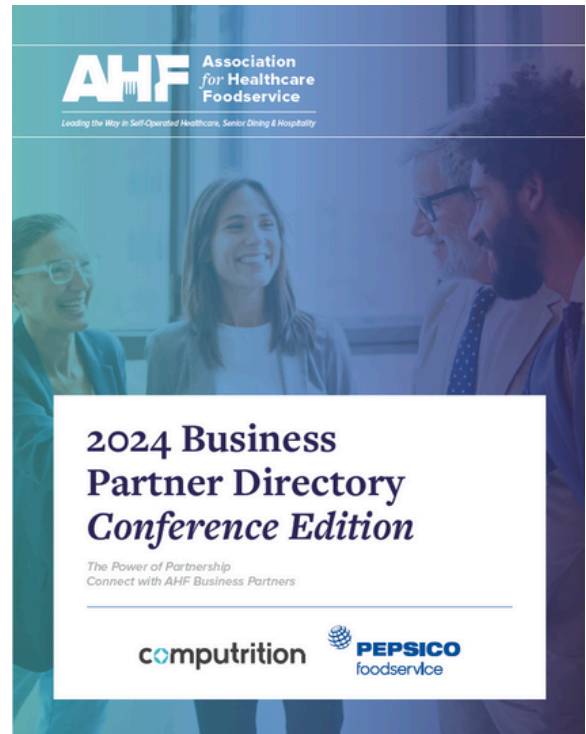
When developing a plant based menu, keep in mind:

- Choice matters
- Highlight market benefits for your customers
- Focus on quality and value
- Marketing is key in making items more appealing, ensure menu descriptors are not generic
- Plant forward trends
- Show team increases in sales and/or reductions in cost
- Partnership with vendors is key
- Start slow, take one category at a time

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SO WHAT'S NEXT?

Take Care of Yourself!

This year we focused on wellness and wellbeing of our operators and their team. Take time to prioritize your well-being, check in with your team, and recharge your resilience levels.

Join AHF

AHF Membership is a critical resource for your success. There are so many critical tools, resources, and connections to find throughout our association. [Learn more.](#)

Get AHF2025 into your budget

Now is the time to make sure our 2025 National Conference is included in your organization's budget. Be sure to budget for yourself and a team member so you can divide and conquer during sessions, our tradeshow, and more. [Download the 2025 justification template letter.](#)

Join an AHF webinar

Our educational programming doesn't end with National Conference. Throughout the year members have access to more than 12 CEU/training opportunities on new trends, ongoing needs and challenges, and fresh ideas. [Explore.](#)

Chat with members in the online community

Use AHF's online community to find support throughout the year. It's a fantastic place to continue the conversations you started in San Antonio. [Start chatting.](#)

Connect With Your C-Suite

If there is one theme we hear each year, it's the importance of getting a seat at the table and finding a C-Suite champion. Tell your C-Suite about what you learned this year, how you will be applying it, and how AHF can support your organizational success.



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Leading the way in self-operated healthcare, senior dining, and hospitality