

Case Study

Looking Back on 20 Years of Finding Solutions

One of a series of reports of the results of Clarion projects, illustrating ways in which dining and hospitality services are improved and new opportunities to increase value are created. Names and identifying details are omitted to protect our client's anonymity.

Dining Insights, Winter 2016

As we embark on our 21st year (and third decade) of helping clients create or improve their dining and hospitality services, it seems like a good time to review the value our long-term relationships have provided our clients.

18 Years of Service

Our longest-lasting relationship is with an international corporation that has manufacturing, research and office facilities with food service operations. In 1998, we evaluated these services and subsequently managed a competitive selection process for a new operator (called a “RFP process” for short). The food service contractor continues to serve the company. From the start, we have reviewed the contractor’s operational and financial performance.

Over the years, because of our increasing familiarity with the operations and the key people on both the client’s and contractor’s side, we have been able to find and point out weaknesses in the operation and in the contractor’s financial reporting, recovering for our client substantial amounts in over-billing and accounting errors.

Currently, we’re working on a new RFP, as our client has decided to review its arrangements for the dining services.

Forging a Partnership

In 1999, a professional firm was relocating its 1,000-population headquarters office. We participated in the planning of the new facilities and operation and managed the RFP process for an operator.

When the new office opened, we were retained to participate in the oversight of the multi-faceted service. This has become our second-longest, and closest, relationship. Our role expanded – managing RFP processes for two other offices and monitoring operational and financial dining operations, now for four offices nationwide.

We’ve become a key participant in the administration of a complex, multi-location dining service. We developed and administer the incentive fee program that rewards or penalizes the operator based on performance and participate in annual budget negotiations.

As with the international corporation, we have saved our client many thousands of dollars more than our services cost.

Campus Success Story

Like many of our projects, our work with a medium-sized college began with a crisis and has been long-lasting but periodic. When the college’s long-time dining service manager was retiring, the administration wondered whether to engage a food service contractor or retain self-operation under a new manager.

Our evaluation of the service found there had been some slippage in quality and organization over the years, but there still was substantial value and the college would be better served by retaining self-management

Our greatest value to our long-term clients is our understanding of their organization, requirements and expectations. This enables us to ensure the service operator is providing full value at a fair cost.

We participated in the recruiting and selection of the new food service director. He enlivened the operation and in his second year at the helm, the college was ranked in its top 20 “best campus food” list by the Princeton Review. A few years later, the director moved on and the long-term manager of the campus retail café and pub was promoted into the director’s position.

A Clarion associate worked with the new director for a semester in reorganizing the management and improving the service, until she had firm control. The college has been on Princeton Review’s best food list ever since, usually, and currently, in the top 10.

When the administration decided to explore the contractor-management option, we provided information and advice to the evaluation committee. They retained their own operation under the same director.

Later, we developed the operational and facilities plans for a limited-service cafe/c-store for the campus center building.

Currently, we’re discussing plans for the renovation of the main dining hall.

Working With Both Sides

A case study in the Winter 2015 *Insights* described how we converted a subsidized dining service at a large graduate school and research center into a self-sustaining operation that pays a commission to our client and earns a profit for the operator.

We’re now in our third year of monitoring the service. As with our other on-going relationships, we keep our client advised about the dining service’s performance.

We also provide a fresh perspective to the on-site manager and form a cooperative team with both client and contractor for the benefit of both – and the dining service’s customers and guests.

How We Provide Value

The greatest value our continuing relationships provide our clients is the assurance their services remain at the level of quality and service they require. When a problem arises, we’re close enough to understand and find an effective solution that works and protects their interests.