



Navigating Workforce Challenges

A Strategic Guide for Minnesota Restaurants

Prepared in partnership with Performance Foodservice Minnesota and Hospitality Minnesota

A Difficult Moment for Our Industry

The surge in immigration enforcement across our state has created immediate operational crises for restaurants, hotels, and hospitality businesses throughout Minnesota. Workforce disruptions are happening in real-time. Staff members are afraid. Owners are scrambling to maintain operations. Communities are feeling the impact.

This isn't a political newsletter. It's a resource guide during a crisis.

Whether you're dealing with immediate staffing emergencies, worried employees, legal questions, or wondering how to keep your doors open—you're not alone. Let's talk about what's happening, what resources exist, and how we move forward together.



The Reality: Our Industry Is Built on Immigrant Labor

According to the National Restaurant Association, immigrants make up approximately 23% of the restaurant and food service workforce nationally. In urban areas and certain segments (back-of-house operations, food prep, dishwashing), that percentage is significantly higher—often 40-60%.

In Minnesota specifically:

- The hospitality industry employs over 280,000 people
- Immigrant workers represent a substantial portion of this workforce
- Many have been with their employers for years—they're trained, reliable, and integral to operations
- They work in every segment: QSR, casual dining, fine dining, hotels, catering, institutional food service

The business impact of enforcement actions:

- Immediate staffing shortages forcing reduced hours or temporary closures
- Remaining staff working double shifts, leading to burnout
- Difficulty finding replacement workers (unemployment remains low)
- Disruption to customer service and operational consistency
- Revenue loss during closures or reduced capacity

This isn't theoretical. This is happening now to businesses across Minnesota.

Operating Today: What You SHOULD DO Right Now

If you're facing workforce disruption, have concerned employees, or at a loss of direction as an operator, here are some immediate action steps to take:

DO: Verify Your I-9 Compliance.

- Ensure all employment eligibility forms are complete, accurate, and properly stored. Consult with an employment attorney if you have questions. Proactive compliance protects both you and your employees.

DO: Communicate Calmly with Your Team.

- Your employees are scared. Provide factual information about their rights. Share the Know Your Rights hotline. Let them know you're there to support them within legal boundaries.

DO: Have a Business Continuity Plan.

- If you lose multiple staff members suddenly:
 - Which positions are most critical?
 - Who can cross-train immediately?
 - Can you temporarily reduce hours or menu offerings?
 - Do you have relationships with staffing agencies?

DO: Document Everything.

- If ICE or other enforcement agencies come to your business:
 - You can ask for a warrant (administrative warrants vs. judicial warrants have different requirements)
 - You can contact an attorney before providing access to non-public areas
 - Document who came, when, what they requested, what you provided
 - Consult an Immigration Attorney
 - If you have questions about specific employees' situations, work authorization, or your obligations, speak with a qualified immigration attorney. Don't rely on general advice.



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Operating Now: What You SHOULD NOT DO Right Now

If you have questions about specific employees' situations, work authorization, or your obligations, speak with a qualified immigration attorney. Don't rely on general advice.

- **DO NOT: Provide False Documents or Information.** Never create, accept, or help obtain fraudulent work authorization documents. This exposes you to serious legal liability.
- **DO NOT: Make Promises You Can't Keep.** You can't prevent immigration enforcement. You can't guarantee protection. Be honest about what you can and cannot do.
- **DO NOT: Discriminate.** Treating employees differently based on perceived immigration status, national origin, or citizenship creates legal liability under employment discrimination laws.
- **DO NOT: Ignore Mental Health Needs.** This is traumatic for your team. Consider bringing in EAP resources, offering flexible schedules for employees dealing with family situations, or simply creating space for people to talk.
- **DO NOT: Go It Alone.** Connect with other operators. Join Hospitality Minnesota calls and forums. Share resources. This is affecting everyone—we navigate it better together.



Innovative Workforce Strategies for Right Now

While we work on long-term solutions, here are strategies operators are using today:

Expand Your Recruiting Pool:

- Retirees, parents, and college students looking for part-time work
- Career changers and people with disabilities (considerable amount of untapped talent here)

Improve Retention of Current Staff:

- Consistent scheduling and workplace culture (people will stay for predictability)
- Benefits packages, clear advancement pathways

Operational Adjustments:

- Simplified menus reducing labor needs
- Increased use of prep services or pre-prepared ingredients

Collaborative Solutions:

- Sharing staff between non-competing restaurants during slow periods
- Joint recruiting events and shared training programs with other operators

The Bottom Line

Minnesota's hospitality industry is facing a workforce crisis that was already severe and is now reaching critical levels. But Minnesota's hospitality community is strong. We've weathered crises before. We take care of each other. We find solutions. We keep going, together.

- How we keep going:
 - **What Hospitality Minnesota is doing:** Providing updates on enforcement patterns and resources, legal resource connections, advocacy with state and federal officials and crisis management best practices.
 - **What Performance Foodservice MN is doing:** Offering operational consulting on menu simplification, labor-saving product solutions, flexible ordering during disruptions, and connection to workforce resources.
 - **What you can do:** Join Hospitality Minnesota member calls and forums, share your experiences and strategies with peers, connect with legal resources proactively, take care of your team and yourself, and stay engaged in advocacy efforts.



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