



## **Multi-Unit Manager 2009 Research Shows Need for More Training & Development** by Jim Sullivan Copyright 2009 Sullivision.com

*"Only when the tide goes out do you find who's not wearing a bathing suit."--Warren Buffett*

Hopefully you've spent the last year successfully weathering a challenging economy and leveraging its downside by incrementally improving your processes, systems, costs and people. As pundit Tom Peters put it: "This is no time to waste a crisis." If you *are* succeeding as a chain operator despite the downturn, there's little doubt that the one person most instrumental to that success are your multi-unit managers (MUMs). This critical regional leader is responsible for both interpreting and applying strategies from the executive suite to the street, making certain that every unit in every market is aligned and operating efficiently and effectively. And we know that synchronous unit-level execution is critical for two reasons: 1) the store is where the company meets the customer and 2) there are no cash registers at headquarters. So as multi-unit leadership skills become more critical in these let's-do-with-less-but-make-less-better-times, how can smart companies transition their Area Managers from good to great?



We recently concluded our annual research survey of foodservice multi-unit managers. The 2009 edition (conducted between September 2008 and August 2009) assessed the behaviors of 288 high-performing area directors, regional managers and multi-unit franchise owners across 27 different foodservice brands. Some of the leaders surveyed oversaw as few as five units each, others as many as thirty-four. Here's an overview of the feedback to help you assess, develop and improve your own MUMs.

- ❑ As the economy constricted this year, many companies cut costs by consolidating territories and eliminating many MUM positions. Multi-unit managers now oversee an average of 8.5 units each (last year's average was seven). So leadership scalability, oversight, and resources were stretched as customer traffic flattened.
- ❑ Our industry collectively trained less in the last year. Unit managers received an average of twelve hours of ongoing job-related training between September 2008 and August 2009 (down 20% from 2007). QSR hourly team members received an average of six hours of post-orientation training (down 30%). Multi-unit managers received an average of 2.5 hours of job-specific training, down over 40% from 2007 numbers. (Yes, you read that right, hourly crew got nearly three times more education last year than their MUMs did.)
- ❑ 92% of the companies we surveyed did no MUM-specific training for their area managers. The training they did receive involved sitting through annual unit

**Sign up for our free monthly leadership e-newsletter at [Sullivision.com](http://Sullivision.com)**

manager or franchisee conferences. This implies they're either 1) too smart to learn more, 2) that they'll improve on their own, or 3) the company doesn't know how to develop their skills to another level. "One of the biggest mistakes you can make," one MUM told us, "is presuming that what made you successful to this point will continue to do so."

- The top ten performance challenges that our MUM research group cited: 1) the economy, 2) softening sales and customer traffic, 3) burgeoning paperwork and reports, 4) pricing and budgets, 5) competing priorities, 6) time management, 7) conducting impactful unit visits, 8) developing managers, 9) communication/training, and 10) balancing home and work demands. In reviewing these concerns, you'll notice that nearly every challenge--save #1 and #4--relates to the ability to set clear priorities and then effectively achieve them. So when assessing your MUM's development needs, invest first in teaching them a sound and realistic 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to priority-setting and time management. Because no matter what other leadership skills they have, you must first know the difference between what's important and what's urgent and how to apportion time properly to get the right things done right.
  
- Unlike a musician or an athlete—who can succeed by being very good at just one thing—MUMs need to master multiple competencies to succeed as leaders. There are seven distinct stages that high-performing multi-unit managers grow through as they evolve from hands-on leadership (GM) to governance (MUM). We call these stages *Brand Ambassador*, *Talent Scout*, *Servant Leader*, *Head Coach*, *Marketing Guru*, *Synergist*, and *Goal-Getter*. Each stage is progressively more challenging. Successful MUMs use the mastery of one stage as the foundation for achieving the next, and then “re-use” the skills of an earlier competency when situational leadership demands it. So each stage is sequential, but fluid, if you're taught how to learn from your experience. This confirms two long-held suspicions: that good leaders are made, not born, and that experience teaches only the teachable.

Space constraints limit sharing a whole lot more detail, but I think it's illuminating to close with some verbatim key lessons in leadership that our MUM research subjects offered:

- “Leadership is a team sport. If you feel lonely as a multi-unit manager, you're doing something wrong.
- Teach unit managers first how to think instead of telling them what to do.
- Conform your leadership style to the person you're coaching, don't expect them to adapt to you.
- To bring out the best in others, leadership coaching must match the development level of the person being led. Giving a manager too much or too little direction can have a negative impact on their development.

- Make tacit knowledge explicit. Whatever one unit manager knows that moves the business forward should be shared with every other manager you supervise.
- The team tends to under-learn and over-forget, so over-teach.
- Hire managers with an affinity for learning and teachable points-of-view. These skills cannot be taught or bought. All others can.
- Identify a specific training target every day. Make certain you teach that person something new.
- Lack of time is actually a lack of priorities.
- Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers.
- Strong leadership with weak management is no better and sometimes worse than the reverse. Build a talent scaffold underneath you.
- Focus first on where the company and the customer meet and then build your solutions outward from that moment-of-truth.
- Be curious. Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.”

What you do about developing your MUM’s leadership skills is up to you, but wise operators know that to keep leading, you must keep learning. If your MUMs are expected to do more, but you’re developing them less, you’re ultimately playing a zero-sum game against both chance and change. Deep smarts win in the new world of foodservice.

**To see more of Sullivan’s 2009 MUM research, and take a free leadership self-assessment on the seven stages identified above, visit [www.Sullivision.com](http://www.Sullivision.com) and click on Multi Unit Managers.**