



How Chick-fil-A achieved 30% growth in capacity by optimizing its people

Background

By all accounts, Chick-fil-A is a leader in the fast casual space. When you look at the numbers, it's not hard to see why they're dominating the space: the average Chick-fil-A franchise brings in a staggering [\\$4.4M on average, per store, annually](#). Not only that, but the chain consistently beats competitors like KFC and Panera, outselling them by 3X and 2X respectively, despite having fewer stores and being open 52 fewer days per year.

And while the quality and taste of their chicken sandwiches and waffle fries definitely set Chick-fil-A apart, it's their famed dedication to providing top-notch customer service and the people who deliver it that are its true differentiators.

The Opportunity

It was that unwavering dedication to people that initially attracted Daniel Light to Chick-fil-A. During his 18-year tenure at Chick-fil-A, Light graduated from restaurant employee to operations director and HR coordinator. Currently, he is the Talent Director for Chick-fil-A's Wake Forest branch where he works with leadership to improve performance by optimizing their talent.

As a leader in the space, by definition, things are already going pretty well—but that doesn't mean they couldn't be better. "We were in the top two and a half percent of sales in the country, but we knew we could produce more. When you're in the restaurant business, there's a sense that, at some point, you're going to camp out. You're not going to be able to produce more. There are only so many parking spots, machines that you can cook with, etc." said Light.

So Light and the leadership team set their sights on improving the franchise's overall capacity—the key to which would be establishing a leadership team that could handle the growth in production that would be required to do so. Their business strategy required a strong people strategy, so Light set out to define one.

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**Daniel Light - Talent Director,
Wake Forest**

The Solution

Charged with increasing capacity and creating a leadership team to lead the charge, Light turned to other franchisees in the Chick-fil-A network to better understand how they'd been able to increase capacity. During a visit to the West Palm Beach franchise, the owner introduced him to The Predictive Index®.

The owner explained that they leveraged PI to interview and hire people who would be ideal behavioral fits.

Most importantly, they also leveraged PI to identify leaders that already existed within their restaurants and to make sure they had their talent in roles where they'd be most productive, leading to stronger employee performance.

Inherently, Light knew that in order to increase capacity and maximize business results, the leadership team needed to focus on developing a strategy that optimized their people. As he put it, "Capacity is not driven by facilities; capacity is driven by people."

Step one of designing Chick-fil-A's people strategy was to collect the critical people data needed to conduct a leadership gap analysis leveraging the PI Behavioral Assessment™. Light quickly realized that PI could help him create the people strategy he needed to optimize talent at Chick-fil-A and to achieve the capacity results their growth strategy required.

Light described the findings of the analysis this way: "We found that we had operational teams of 12 or 14 people at each restaurant, and only half of them were successful. We couldn't figure out why until we got PI. We realized that some of these people were great at collaborating with others but not so great at decision making [in a fast-paced environment]."

He continued, "The problem is that, at a restaurant—especially at a fast-paced restaurant—there are new situations every day. We realized that we had some people in high-level leadership positions that were better at collaborating with people and should've been in training positions, and we had people in training positions that should have been in operator positions."

Light realized they had a talent mismatch. "We had some people who were impeding our ability to increase capacity. They were stopping people from learning and growing. They weren't bad people; they were doing it because they didn't know how to do the opposite."

Next, Light made it his mission to get the right people into the right roles to align people's natural drives and

behaviors with positions where they'd be more productive, moving people from operations to training and vice versa. In some cases, he worked with people who weren't a great match for Chick-fil-A's behavioral and cultural needs to find new positions elsewhere, stating, "The big thing for us is that we don't want to be life stealers. So if we identified that you couldn't be successful at Chick-fil-A, we'd help you find a new place where you would be successful."

The Results

After identifying and filling leadership gaps and placing talent in their optimal positions across restaurants, Light started to see the results almost immediately, reporting a 15 percent increase in customer service scores and 30 percent increase in business capacity.

"What we found was that we were creating an organization that was functioning at a higher level because we had some insight into the behavioral patterns and needs of our people," said Light.

And with those kinds of results, the proof was truly in the pudding. When your talent is optimized, so is your business.

<https://www.chick-fil-a.com/>

Employees: 200+

Industry: Hospitality/Food Services

Region: North America

PI customer since: 2016

