







MAXIMISING HOSPITALITY PRODUCTIVITY



Your Guide to Offsetting Increasing
Labour Costs

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INTRODUCTION

With the April 2025 rises in National Insurance Contributions (NIC) and National Living Wage (NLW), operators are facing a 10% increase in labour costs. Many hospitality businesses are aiming to improve productivity to offset these increases. The challenge is clear: how do you protect profit margins without compromising service quality?

WHO IS IT FOR

This guide is designed for pubs, bars, and restaurants looking to streamline operations, improve team efficiency, and offset rising labour costs. In this guide you'll find practical strategies to help you make the most of every shift.



1. MASTERING SLACK

Streamline day-to-day operations to reduce wasted time and costs.



WHAT IS SLACK?

Slack is the number of people on the rota above the amount needed to deliver the agreed service levels.

While slack is often wasted labour, it is also a killer of energy and motivation for the team.

Slack is forecastable and a good place to start looking for savings, but it is also an opportunity to energise service.

“Slack is the enemy of good service”



SLACK TIME TASKS

Some tasks don't need extra labour—just better timing. Instead of scheduling additional hours for jobs like slicing lemons, polishing glassware, or restocking fridges, these can be done during natural lulls in service, that may otherwise be slack time.

Using quiet moments effectively means getting ahead of all the tasks that need to be done, without increasing labour costs. A flexible approach to quiet moments helps ensure slow periods aren't wasted and that every shift is as efficient as possible.





OPTIMISE OPENING AND CLOSING PROCEDURES

Opening and closing are pure slack tasks. While there are no customers to serve or sales to generate, there is a minimum labour requirement to do it safely. However there are savings to be made by moving as much of the labour involved in opening and closing into the shift itself.

“Closing with three rather than two staff, often means that two are chatting while the other is doing all the work.”

Alastair Scott



CHALLENGE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON STAFFING

Every business has ingrained habits that might be adding unnecessary costs—but knowing where and how to challenge them with the team is a challenge.

If certain staffing patterns have "always worked like that," benchmark data can help highlight more efficient ways of working.

For instance, can more preparation be done during slack hours on Saturday, saving time on a busy Sunday? Having the right insights can help identify hidden overspend and challenge assumptions—unlocking real savings without impacting service quality.

2. SMARTER STAFFING & SCHEDULING

Ensure the right people are in the right place at the right time to optimise labour efficiency.





STAGGERED START TIMES

By matching your labour with customer and sales demand, you can stagger shift start times, so you only have a full team at peak busy hours, without the cost of a full team all day.

For example, gradually bringing in kitchen staff as orders build or phasing in front-of-house teams as footfall increases, ensures you're only paying for staff when they are genuinely needed.

Similarly, as the shift winds down and demand decreases, fewer staff will be required. Removing these quieter periods from the rota can lead to significant reductions in labour costs.

CROSS-TRAINING STAFF

A team that's comfortable stepping into different roles can help operations run more smoothly and requires less labour, particularly during busy periods.

Cross-training team members on different tasks—such as servers supporting the bar or kitchen assistants handling prep—can increase flexibility and reduce reliance on additional hires.

It's also a great way to keep staff engaged and give them more career development opportunities.





REVIEW OVERTIME

Some labour hours cost more than others. Overtime is likely to be the most expensive hours on the rota.

Overtime is sometimes unavoidable, but it can cost significantly more than regular hours.

Making changes—like clearer shift-end protocols or structured handovers—might also help keep shifts within their planned hours.

PLAYER-COACH MANAGERS

Managers who get involved in daily operations tend to have a better understanding of their team's challenges and can step in when needed.

Whether it's helping clear tables during a rush or jumping behind the bar, a hands-on approach can make a big difference to service speed and team morale.

It also reduces the admin time of your best people and gets them to the front line where they can make sales.

(Listen to: [RAW podcast episode 5 – the Player Coach](#))



PRODUCTIVITY-ENHANCING TOOLS

Great rotas start with an accurate forecast. The right system can help identify slack periods, ensuring labour is scheduled only when needed.

Further savings come from 100% time and attendance (T&A) accuracy, meaning you only pay for actual hours worked—no unnecessary costs, or grey areas with the team.

The right tools free up managers' time, allowing them to focus on service, team performance and generating sales.



3. INCREASING SALES & MAXIMISING REVENUE

Make sure every shift delivers its full revenue potential while maintaining service quality.





FORECAST ACCURATELY

Busy periods bring the best opportunities for revenue growth, but only if there are enough staff to serve customers efficiently.

Using sales trends, EPoS data, like for like sales, weather forecasts etc can help create an accurate forecast. This is critical to ensure enough team members are on the rota to maximize sales without overstaffing.

SHIFT BRIEFS

Keeping teams aligned starts with a strong shift brief. Ensuring staff know their targets, incentives, and key focus areas helps create a structured and motivated approach to service.

As the team walk though the door, they are clear on:

- The shift targets.
- The specials and high margin upsells to recommend.
- Team and personal incentives.
- Areas, roles and responsibilities.

When upselling is built into the pre-shift routine, it becomes second nature.





NEXT STEPS

Small changes can make a big impact. The strategies in this guide can help you offset rising labour costs, challenge inefficiencies, and protect your profitability—but productivity is an ongoing process. There's always more you can do to optimise labour management.

At S4labour, we provide both software and consultancy to help operators streamline operations and thrive amid industry challenges.

Want to see how we can help? Book a demo or speak with an expert today.

[Book a Demo](#)

ABOUT US

At S4labour, we've spent 15 years building labour productivity tools tailored for hospitality businesses, helping thousands of operators optimise performance and control costs.

We're not just a software provider—our CEO runs a successful pub group with a strong focus on quality food and exceptional service. We understand first-hand the challenges of running a hospitality business, and we're here to help.

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