TheMRAEF Massachusetts Restaurant Association Educational Foundation | ACCELERATING LEADERS

The MRA Educational Foundation Restaurant Leadership Conference

A One-Day Symposium

Join the MRA Educational Foundation for a day of immersive hospitality leadership training. Explore how to lead stronger teams, identify valuable uses for AI, make better decisions with operating data, and build a culture that helps employees and businesses thrive.

APEX ENTERTAINMENT®

21 Apex Dr, Marlborough, MA

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2026
REGISTRATION: 8:00AM
NETWORKING RECEPTION: 4:30PM
$100 per attendee

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Agenda & Session Descriptions

8:00AM Arrival and Continental Breakfast

9:00AM LEADING DYNAMIC TEAMS



Brian P. Connors, M.S., CHE, CSW
Director of Innovation & Strategy
Accelerating Leaders

"Am I the leader whom I would follow?" Brian opens the day with a question that gets to the heart of effective team leadership. Drawing on established approaches to servant leadership, management, and quality improvement, he will examine what leaders owe the people they lead and how those responsibilities show up in a restaurant's daily operations.

Attendees will consider the difference between directing work and developing people. The session will explore how clear expectations, an appropriate span of control, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement help teams perform across both small and large operations. Participants will leave with a renewed sense of purpose and practical ways to strengthen the teams they lead.

Three takeaways:

1. A way to assess their own leadership through the needs and experience of their team.
2. Practical methods for setting expectations, supporting managers, and building accountability.
3. Ideas for using mentorship and development to help employees grow into greater responsibility.

11:00AM Break

11:15AM THE KENDALL PROMPT



Kevin Gully
Co-founder
The Kendal Project

Restaurant leaders are hearing about AI from every direction, but deciding where it could make a measurable difference in their own operation is much harder. In this session, Kevin will introduce the Kendall Project's problem-first approach to AI: start with a real source of operational friction, determine whether it is worth solving, and identify the business knowledge, rules, and constraints an AI solution would need to be useful.

Using examples from labor, inventory, and margins, attendees will learn how to identify the work required to turn an AI opportunity into a working solution. This session will give leaders a practical starting point for moving from scattered experiments toward AI initiatives tied to restaurant performance.

Three takeaways:

1. A way to identify operational problems where AI could deliver meaningful value.
2. A clearer understanding of the context, rules, and constraints AI needs to produce reliable results.
3. A framework for prioritizing potential AI initiatives by their business value and feasibility.

12:00PM Lunch

1:00PM ASK COLETTE: RESTAURANT OPERATIONS AI



Eli Feldman
Owner, Shy Bird
Co-Founder, Colette

Restaurant teams make countless decisions during a shift, but the information behind those decisions often sits in different systems, conversations, or managers' heads. Drawing on his experience as an operator, Eli will explore how AI can help teams keep operating knowledge accessible, communicate across shifts, and follow through on issues that need attention.

Using Colette as a real-world example, he will discuss how connected information from restaurant systems can support decisions about service, staffing, maintenance, and daily operations while keeping the people closest to the work involved.

Three takeaways

1. How to spot information gaps that lead to missed handoffs and repeated questions.
2. Examples of how shared operating knowledge can help teams coordinate and act.
3. A clearer sense of what to look for when evaluating AI tools for restaurant operations.

2:00PM ENHANCING PRACTICAL BUSINESS ACUMEN



Patrick Renna
CFO, Proof of the Pudding

Strong operators understand how the decisions they make on the floor affect the financial health of the business. Patrick will introduce a practical approach to reading the numbers behind restaurant performance, connecting the profit and loss statement, cash flow statement, and balance sheet to everyday management decisions.

Drawing from his work in foodservice financial management, he will examine how budgets establish a plan, how variances reveal where actual results differ, and how leaders can respond to pressures in labor, inventory, and cash. Attendees will leave better equipped to ask useful questions of their financial reports and act on what the numbers show.

Three takeaways

1. A clearer understanding of how the three core financial statements work together.
2. A practical way to compare a budget with actual results and investigate meaningful variances.
3. Managerial actions that can help control labor, inventory, and cash costs.

3:00PM Break

3:15PM INSPIRING A POSITIVE & EVOLVING CULTURE



Brian P. Connors, M.S., CHE, CSW
Director of Innovation & Strategy
Accelerating Leaders

Culture influences how employees work together, how they respond to change, and how guests experience a restaurant. Brian will explore culture as a set of shared beliefs, values, and everyday behaviors that shapes a company's reputation and its ability to deliver customer-centered service.

Attendees will consider how leaders can recognize the formal and informal cultures within a team, bring employees with different backgrounds and perspectives together, and reinforce the behaviors they want to see. The session will connect a positive workplace culture with employee commitment, consistent service, and long-term business performance.

Three takeaways

1. A way to identify the beliefs and behaviors currently shaping their workplace culture.
2. Approaches for connecting employees across roles, generations, and experiences.
3. Specific leadership actions that can strengthen employee commitment and customer-centered service.

4:30PM Networking cocktails and passed appetizers

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