



# Training Program Case Study



## The Embedded Training Engine Behind Tickle My Ribs

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Tickle My Ribs is a rising franchise in the fast-casual restaurant space, offering Carolina-style barbecue with bold flavors and a focus on quality, hospitality, and community. Founded by Sean Morris, a seasoned industry leader with experience at Buffalo Wild Wings, Denny's, Lone Star, and Tia's Tex-Mex, the brand blends deep operational expertise with a passion for slow-cooked perfection. Drawing on his roots in a family-run Carolina barbecue chain and two decades of corporate leadership, Morris has designed a franchise concept where operational excellence is driven by training that's embedded into the very fabric of the business.

Tickle My Ribs isn't just selling food—it's delivering a consistent, high-quality dining experience through a repeatable system. The secret? A smart, skill-first training model that scales effortlessly across locations.

### Benefits of the Tickle My Ribs Training Program

The training program at Tickle My Ribs delivers a wide range of operational and organizational benefits. These include:

- **Reduced employee turnover:** A clear training path, embedded support, and recognition systems help team members feel more confident, capable, and invested in their roles—leading to longer tenure and lower turnover rates.
- **Faster ramp-up for new hires:** The program is designed to quickly bring new team members up to speed through real-time, role-specific guidance and a structured onboarding track.
- **Increased consistency across locations:** Standardized training tools and processes ensure that every franchise location delivers the same quality experience, no matter where it's located.
- **Lower training overhead:** By using embedded tools like the POS system and station checklists, the program reduces the need for costly off-floor training sessions or printed manuals.
- **A strong internal trainer pipeline:** High-performing crew members are given the opportunity to become Certified Trainers, providing peer-to-peer coaching and reinforcing a culture of continuous learning.



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## Who needs to be Trained

The training program supports a range of learners across the franchise:

- **Hourly Crew Members:** Frontline team members working stations (line, cashier, prep, expo, etc.)
- **Shift Leaders:** Team members responsible for managing daily operations and reinforcing standards
- **Certified Trainers:** High-performing employees who coach new hires
- **Franchise Managers:** Unit-level leaders accountable for store performance
- **Franchise Owners/Operators:** Business owners who must understand both operational standards and training protocols

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## What Each Learner Type Needs to Know and Do

Each learner within the Tickle My Ribs system has a distinct role to play, and the training program is tailored to meet those unique needs. Whether preparing food on the line, managing daily operations, or coaching new team members, learners must acquire job-specific knowledge and skills that ensure quality, consistency, and efficiency across every store. The following outlines what each learner type is expected to know and do:

### Hourly Crew Members

- Learn and consistently execute food preparation techniques, including cutting, portioning, seasoning, and assembling dishes to brand specifications.
- Follow safety and sanitation protocols across every station, ensuring compliance with health standards.
- Master operational routines for their assigned shifts—whether opening, mid-day, or closing—including equipment setup and shutdown.
- Navigate POS chit instructions for accurate plating, timing, and portion control during active service.
- Adapt quickly to new menu items or changes in preparation standards via real-time POS training prompts.

### Shift Leaders

- Serve as the bridge between crew and management, ensuring team alignment with brand standards and store goals.
- Actively reinforce daily checklists and SOPs, while identifying and correcting performance gaps.
- Coach and provide feedback to team members in real time, while maintaining pace, safety, and guest satisfaction.



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- Oversee shift transitions, opening and closing processes, and ensure proper handoffs between teams.

## Certified Trainers

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- Deliver shoulder-to-shoulder, on-the-job instruction using standardized checklists and visual job aids.
- Sign off on skill completions and training progress based on observed performance.
- Model excellence in technical execution, guest service, and team collaboration.
- Mentor new hires and junior team members, creating a supportive learning environment.

## Franchise Managers

- Ensure compliance with training protocols and oversee trainer performance.
- Align all team development efforts with broader operational metrics such as speed of service, ticket accuracy, and customer satisfaction.
- Use reporting tools and observations to identify strengths and weaknesses in store-level training effectiveness.
- Collaborate with franchise owners to build and maintain a strong bench of certified talent.

## Franchise Owners

- Understand the ROI of the training system and its direct impact on store performance.
- Monitor overall training compliance, certification rates, and engagement metrics across their locations.
- Empower managers and trainers with the resources they need while ensuring alignment with brand standards and culture.

## Challenges Faced by the Training Program

As effective as the Tickle My Ribs training program is, it operates in a high-velocity environment where operational demands and human factors present ongoing hurdles. These challenges are common across the restaurant industry, but the brand's emphasis on quality, consistency, and rapid scale adds additional complexity. Below are the key obstacles the program continues to navigate:

- **High Employee Turnover:** The fast-casual restaurant industry experiences frequent staffing changes, and Tickle My Ribs is no exception. Onboarding must be efficient and impactful, but high turnover puts constant pressure on training systems to deliver fast, consistent results with every new hire.



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- **Scalability with Consistency:** As the franchise network grows, it becomes increasingly challenging to maintain uniform training standards across diverse store layouts, teams, and regional operations. Materials must be flexible yet consistent—an operational balancing act.
- **Learner Engagement and Accountability:** Not every team member brings the same level of motivation or learning style. Trainers must engage a wide spectrum of personalities while also ensuring accountability and adherence to standards, which can stretch leadership bandwidth.
- **Technology Dependence and Timing:** The training program's success hinges on real-time, POS-integrated prompts. If POS updates lag or aren't clearly communicated, learners can miss important changes, leading to inconsistent execution during peak service times.
- **Trainer Development and Consistency:** Identifying skilled employees is only the first step. Ensuring Certified Trainers are consistently effective across locations requires ongoing coaching, clear criteria, and tools to assess training quality.

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Despite these challenges, the Tickle My Ribs program is resilient. Its embedded, skill-first approach allows for agile adaptation, enabling teams to maintain high performance and customer satisfaction—even in a dynamic and demanding industry.

## Training Best Practices & Roadmap Stage

Tickle My Ribs is operating at Stage 3: Skill Development on the Latitude Learning Training Program Roadmap. At this stage, the focus is on strengthening job-specific competencies, reinforcing on-the-job performance, and building mastery that translates directly to operational excellence. The training program reflects best practices that are essential to Stage 3 success:

- **Operationally Embedded Learning:** Training is seamlessly integrated into day-to-day work environments. Employees learn on the floor, shoulder-to-shoulder with certified trainers, gaining real-world experience rather than relying on classroom-style instruction.
- **POS-Integrated Microlearning:** Instructions and updates are delivered in real time through the POS system. Plating standards, portion sizes, and task prompts are built into the workflow, creating continual reinforcement of the right behaviors.
- **Role- and Shift-Specific Training Paths:** Learners are trained on the exact tasks they'll perform, aligned with their current role and shift assignment. This ensures precision in execution and avoids cognitive overload.
- **Gamified Progression and Visual Cues:** Crew members earn embroidered skill patches and can visually advance through ranks. Certified Trainers wear red shirts and hats, signaling leadership status and inspiring others.



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- **Culture of Growth and Retention:** The program supports long-term team development by making training transparent, consistent, and personally rewarding. Employees know what it takes to level up, fostering trust and internal promotion.
- **Modular and Scalable Structure:** Training content is built around stations and microtasks, making it easy to update and replicate as new franchise locations open. This design supports rapid, controlled scaling.

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As Tickle My Ribs expands, its training program is equipped not only to onboard new teams efficiently but to drive long-term performance across every level of the organization.

## How the Training Program Operates

Behind the scenes of Tickle My Ribs' training success is a well-organized, thoughtfully designed operational framework. Each component—from how learners are segmented to how content is assigned and updated—works together to create a seamless learning experience. The following sections outline how the program functions across various elements of training management:

### Organize Learners

Learners within the training system are categorized based on their roles and certification levels. These include crew members, shift leaders, certified trainers, managers, and franchise owners. Each role follows a defined development pathway, ensuring that learners are equipped with the appropriate tools and knowledge for their responsibilities. The LMS clearly maps out this progression to support career growth and operational clarity.

### Organize Training Content

Training content is structured in a modular format, making it easy to deliver and scale. Modules are designed around restaurant stations like the line, cashier, or prep areas, and are further refined by shift (opening, mid, or close). Content is also segmented by certification level and includes microtasks such as assembling a pork sandwich or cutting lemons. This organization ensures that team members can focus on the skills most relevant to their roles.

### Learner Experience

Learners engage with training through a system that's tightly integrated into their daily workflow. Instructions are delivered through POS chits that provide real-time guidance on tasks like portion size and plating. Updates appear on-screen during clock-in, reinforcing daily priorities. Laminated checklists are also posted at each station to provide consistent visual reminders of standard procedures.



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## Create and Update Training Content

The training program is designed for agility, with content updates pushed directly through the POS system. When a new menu item is introduced or an existing procedure is revised, updates are automatically distributed across all locations. This eliminates the need for printed manuals or separate retraining sessions, ensuring consistent standards without disrupting operations.

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## Manage Learner Access

Access to training content is controlled based on the learner's role. Crew members are only shown content relevant to their shift tasks, while certified trainers and managers can view certification progress and checklists. Franchise owners have broader access to reporting tools that provide insights across their entire operation.

## Assign Training

Training assignments are determined by a combination of role, hire date, and store schedule. New hires are placed on an onboarding track aligned with their shift responsibilities, and as they progress, additional modules become available. This structured approach ensures that learners receive the right information at the right time.

## Track Training Program

Progress tracking combines manual verification with digital oversight. Certified trainers sign off on completed skills using checklists, and managers confirm task execution during shifts. The POS system also logs activity, providing an additional layer of accountability and data for training analysis.

## Reward and Incentivize Learners

The program incorporates visible, performance-based incentives to motivate learners. Certified trainers wear red hats and shirts, signaling their expertise to the team. Crew members earn embroidered patches for mastering core skills. Team meetings provide opportunities for public recognition, and internal promotion pathways reward consistent performance and engagement.

## Improve Training Program

Continuous improvement is a built-in feature of the training strategy. Weekly manager meetings include reviews of training effectiveness and feedback from the floor. POS analytics are monitored for recurring issues or trends, and input from trainers and peers is used to refine content and delivery methods.

## Measure Success

Success is measured through a combination of employee and operational metrics. Key indicators include employee retention rates, time-to-certification, secret shopper scores, customer satisfaction, and average ticket speed. These metrics provide a



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comprehensive view of how well the training program supports both individual performance and overall business goals.

## Conclusion

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Tickle My Ribs has turned franchise training into a strategic advantage by embedding learning into daily operations and empowering team members at every level. With a unique blend of POS-powered instruction, gamified achievement systems, and skill-first coaching, the program builds competence and confidence without adding administrative overhead. As the brand scales, this training system ensures consistency, reduces turnover, and keeps team members motivated—not just trained. It's not just about learning tasks—it's about mastering a craft, one plate at a time.

To learn more about Tickle My Ribs, go to [www.tmrbbq.com](http://www.tmrbbq.com).