crunchtime

8 RED FLAGS of restaurant scheduling

How to find and fix broken scheduling habits that hurt operations

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8 Red Flags of Restaurant Scheduling

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An accurate forecast can be the difference between a perfectly staffed shift and a nightmare shift.

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You need every manager to lead like your best manager, in a fraction of the time.

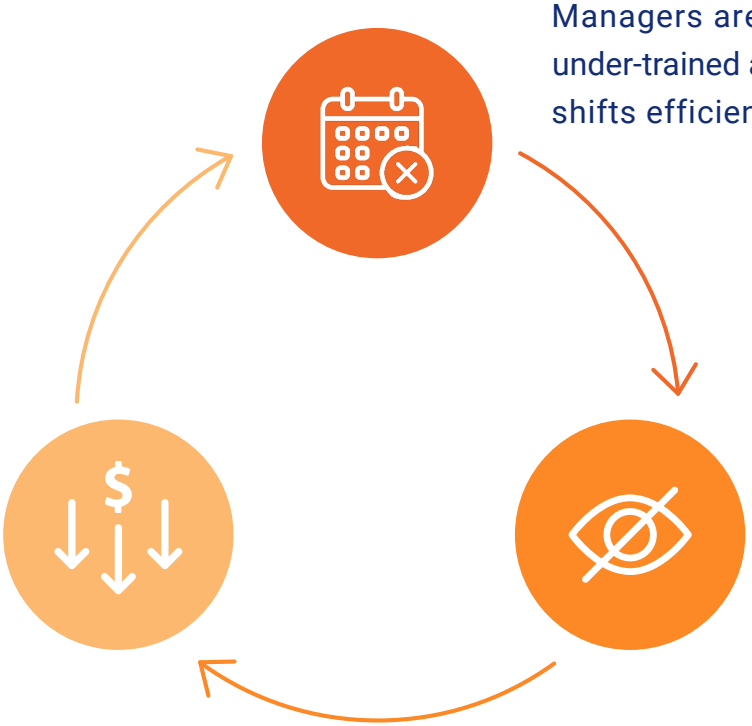
1 Managing Labor Is More Challenging and Complex than Ever Before

Labor challenges in the restaurant industry are like the dinner rush—**chaotic, nonstop,** and just when you think you've got it under control, **another wave hits.**

Despite these persistent challenges—from ever-rising wages to revolving-door turnover—many operators continue using scheduling solutions that have not evolved with modern labor demands.

The result? A reactive cycle of scheduling that looks something like this:

Poor scheduling goes unchecked
Managers are overburdened and under-trained as they struggle to staff shifts efficiently and compliantly



Above-store teams lack the visibility to address scheduling issues
Many organizations lack time, resources, and the right information to fix, or even know that there is a problem

Overpaying on labor is draining profits
Strategies like raising menu prices can only work for so long

If any of these resonate with you, it's time to break the cycle. And if you're still relying on a scheduling solution that hasn't adapted to the current labor landscape, you might be missing a crucial opportunity to take charge. The right tools can make all the difference in reducing labor costs and improving efficiency, but first, you need to identify the signs that your current solution is no longer cutting it.

How? In this guide, we share **eight red flags** that restaurants often overlook when it comes to effective scheduling. Use this list to break out of the scheduling trap and get your labor operation ready to crush the dinner rush every day at every location.

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8 Scheduling Red Flags That Are Hurting Your Operation

Are your scheduling processes working against you?

RED FLAG #1

You prioritize speed over quality when building schedules

Anyone can build a schedule fast. The real test is matching schedules with demand to keep your costs in check. If you are purely focused on creating schedules quickly with no measure of quality, you are likely missing a huge opportunity to optimize your labor and team's productivity.

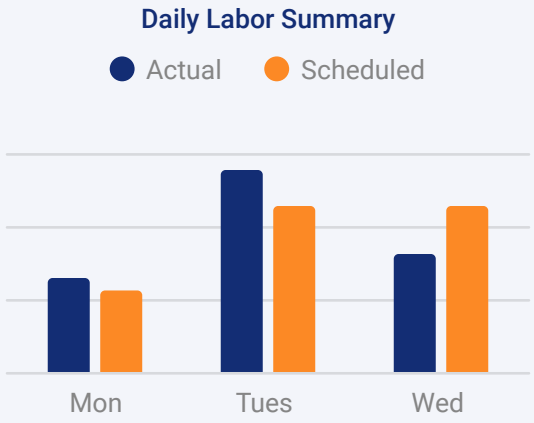
THE FIX

Ask yourself, how do you currently measure overstaffing or understaffing at each store location? Can you quantify how it impacts your profitability?

To truly understand if you are building cost-effective, optimized schedules, you need to dive into your post-shift data. Start by comparing your actual labor cost percentage with the scheduled labor cost percentage.

Once you determine where you need to improve your scheduling, whether it's over or understaffing, it's time to start looking at how you predict demand.

38% of shifts
are over or understaffed*
**2023 Restaurant Operations Report*



If your forecast is too low and you don't schedule enough staff, you'll end up with low actual labor, and a potentially understaffed shift, leading to poor service, and even bad reviews.

If your forecast is too high and you schedule too many team members, you'll end up with high actual labor, and an overstaffed shift that drives up costs.

An accurate forecast is key to scheduling the right amount of staff to meet demand.

RED FLAG #2

Your forecast is off

An accurate forecast can be the difference between a perfectly staffed shift and a nightmare shift. It can also be the difference between meeting your labor cost goals and cutting into profits.

Relying on a GM's intuition introduces significant variability in forecasting accuracy. While seasoned GMs may achieve reasonable results based on experience, leveraging technology ensures that newer managers can forecast with expert-level precision from day one. At the same time, it empowers experienced GMs to refine their approach and drive even greater accuracy and efficiency. While many forecasting tools promise to accurately predict demand, not all solutions are created equal.

THE FIX

Ditch the manual forecasting and aim for forecast accuracy between 85%-99% system-wide. This may sound far-fetched, but it's completely achievable.

Look for a forecasting solution that includes the following:

- **Auto-forecast:** just set it and forget it
- **AI forecasting:** new machine learning technology is changing the game
- **Recommendations** for exactly how many hours to schedule each position
- **Forecasting** is built into the scheduling platform at no additional charge

Jersey Mike's reports

80-99%

accuracy using Crunchtime's labor forecasting

Don't overlook your forecast.

RED FLAG #3

You're chasing the wrong labor metrics

While labor cost percentage is an important metric, it doesn't always tell the full story. A low labor cost percentage may seem favorable, but it could also be the result of understaffing, which often leads to a poor guest experience.

Another common data pitfall is overfocusing on monthly averages, or the average of a regional group of stores. Averages can easily mask inefficiencies and lead you to operate on the assumption that your costs have no room for improvement. Even worse, it can lead to your labor budget being habitually inflated, making it challenging to identify areas where your labor operation might be underperforming.

THE FIX

Instead of solely relying on labor cost percentage to guide your KPIs, consider using a metric called **earned hours**, which tells you how many hours should have been worked based on the actual sales performance of the restaurant during a specific time period.

Compare your earned hours against the actual number of hours that were worked based on your time records. The goal is to decrease the variance between these two numbers to as close to zero as possible.

A variance close to zero might indicate that your teams are doing a good job of calling in extra people or sending people home during busy or slow days, respectively. Higher variances could signal inefficiencies like over or understaffing.

Remember: Think critically when interpreting your labor metrics. Data tells us a story about business operations but it requires context.

> When it comes to labor, you see your **earned hours**, what your **ideal hours** should be, and it **helps you get the right labor percentage.**
>
> **David Swinford,** Operations Systems Consultant | Zaxby's, 900+ locations

RED FLAG #4

You're flying blind when it comes to labor improvements

Do you have enough data visibility to easily pinpoint which stores are lagging behind and where inefficiencies lie? If you're a multi-unit operator, this becomes even more important—what's working in one market, may not work in another. Without data visibility, you will struggle to create and implement sustainable fixes for your labor operation.

THE FIX

The first step is prioritizing data visibility at every level. You should be able to easily generate reports for a single store, multiple stores, or system-wide.

Your scheduling software should provide comprehensive reports and insights into:

- Labor costs
- Employee performance and productivity
- Labor law compliance and violations
- Scheduling trends
- Time punches

"With labor management reporting, we've already seen **improvements in our labor costs and productivity.**"

Skye Parker, Director of Operations
DMCP Group (Dunkin'), 34 locations

Watch Video

Remember: As your operation grows, so do your reporting needs.

RED FLAG #5

Slow data is holding you back

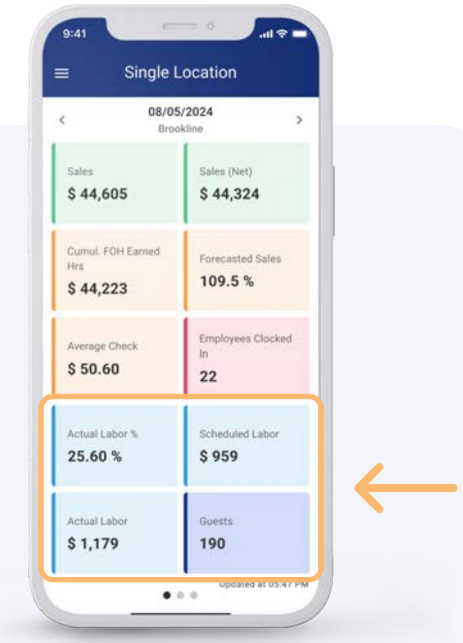
Data timeliness has become non-negotiable in today's fast-paced world. Your teams should have access to information like real-time sales data throughout the shift.

THE FIX

Ask yourself, how quickly can you access your sales data? Can you easily compare labor costs and sales data across multiple locations in real time? Timely data on your labor costs and daily sales should be readily available down to the 15-minute interval for all of your management teams.

If you are waiting hours–or even days–to see your sales stats, it will be impossible for your managers to make real-time staffing decisions on the store floor. Timely data is the foundation of a sustainable operation because data too late is like having no data at all.

If you're waiting 6 hours—or until the next day—to see your sales results, **you're leaving your teams in the dark to make decisions.**



Look for a mobile app that provides you with **labor cost data down to the 15-minute interval**, or even more frequently if your POS system supports it.

RED FLAG #6

Data errors are costing you time and money

Issues with integrations or data integrity can quickly wreak havoc on your operation. Your scheduling solution is likely integrated with a variety of other systems like the POS, HR/payroll, or accounting platforms, and if the data flow is interrupted in one or more areas, you might be creating more problems than solutions.

THE FIX

Don't rely on a one-size-fits-all or default approach to integration, especially when it comes to integrating your payroll system and your scheduling platform. All of your integrations should be built to your operation's specific requirements and goals.

During integration, pay careful attention to how you want the following data points moved between your scheduling platform and your payroll system:

- Employee data: employee IDs, name, position, wage, etc.
- Schedule data: used for schedule enforcement
- Payroll data: by shift or lump sum (including tips and other supplemental wages)
- Time punch data: used for labor reporting and generating payroll

Data errors should never be the norm. Focus on building quality integrations between each of your systems to move, sync, and unify your data. The end result? You can save time, automate workflows, and generate critical insights about your restaurant operation.

For best results, always choose systems that are integration-friendly.

RED FLAG #7

Your support calls are going unanswered

Long wait times and unresolved issues over an extended period of time are not only frustrating but can also damage your operation. If your scheduling provider isn't meeting your needs, you deserve better.

THE FIX

When you're shopping for a new scheduling platform, prioritize providers that see your restaurant brand as a valued partner, not just a transaction.

Get clarity around what happens after you sign the contract by asking these questions during the evaluation process:

- How long do they typically take to answer support tickets?
- How do they prioritize support tickets?
- Will you have a dedicated success manager or account executive?
- What is their plan to ensure that you maximize the value of the platform?
- Do their current customers speak positively about their experience with support?
- Do customers influence the product roadmap and what features are developed next?

RED FLAG #8

New shift leaders struggle with the labor learning curve

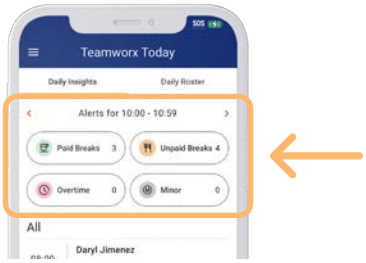
Making decisions on the fly is an essential part of restaurant management, but oftentimes, the ability to plan and lead a successful shift comes from many years of hands-on experience. So what happens when a brand new shift leader is suddenly in charge of calling the shots?

Most operators don't have the luxury of waiting years for their team leaders to develop instincts around when to send staff home or how to schedule a perfectly optimized shift.

THE FIX

Focus on where you can replace guesswork with automation. Automate everything from labor law compliance to forecasting to the schedule build itself. With smart automations, every manager can build a quality, cost-effective schedule in just a few clicks, and there's no need to remember every labor law in the state of California, for example.

You need every manager to lead like your best manager, in a **fraction of the time.**



Use a mobile app with alerts to **keep your managers proactive and informed**, regardless of their experience level.

> To reduce the amount of overstaffed and understaffed shifts, the **forecast tells you exactly when you need people scheduled**, as opposed to any guestimating.
>
> **Brian Hurst,** Senior General Manager | Fazoli's, 195 locations

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Avoid the red flags by taking a smarter approach to your labor and scheduling

If any of these red flags sound familiar, **you're not alone**; many labor and scheduling solutions on the market today are not delivering on their promises, ultimately limiting both profitability and growth.

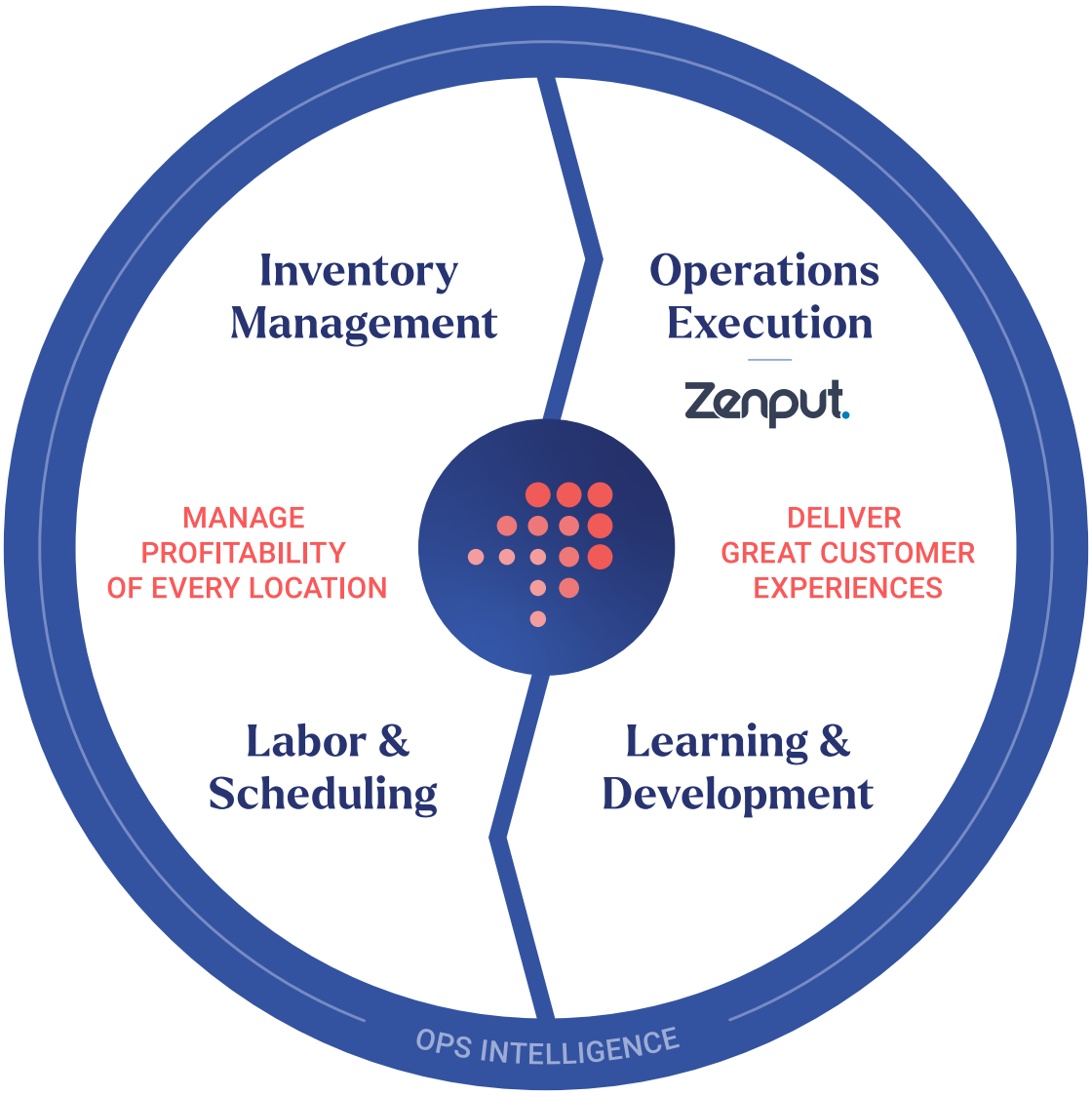
You need an intelligent scheduling platform that knows who needs to be staffed for each shift and provides your teams with the right information to keep your costs in check.

Crunchtime provides restaurant teams like Jersey Mikes, Dunkin', and Fazoli's with smart automations and relevant, real-time data that turns every manager into a scheduling expert and helps organizations regain control of their labor costs.

Ready to get started with smarter scheduling? Get in touch with us today.

GET A PERSONALIZED DEMO

GET IN TOUCH



About Crunchtime

Crunchtime is how the world's top restaurant brands achieve ops excellence in every location. Our software is used in over 150,000 locations in 100+ countries to manage inventory, staff scheduling, learning and development, food safety, operational tasks, and audits. Crunchtime enables customers including Chipotle, Domino's, Dunkin', Five Guys, Jersey Mike's, and P.F. Chang's to control food and labor costs, and deliver great experiences. For more information, visit crunchtime.com.

www.crunchtime.com

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