10 Common Errors in Kitchen Planning and How to Avoid Them

By Foster Frable

1. *Unbalanced planning–emphasis on one function at the expense of others.* Regardless of size or menu, space in every kitchen needs to reflect a balanced allocation for all activities. Often cooking areas become the single focus of the plan and overshadow other functions such as warewashing and dining room service areas. Using appropriate space allocation formulas at the beginning of the planning process assures proper area is allocated for each function.

2. *Under-sizing bulk storage areas.* Understandably, the kitchen planning process focuses on cooking and food preparation. The space left over becomes storage resulting in facilities where the cooking capacity far exceeds the daily capacity to store raw food. When space is tight, storeroom requirements should be carefully calculated based on the net cubic feet required including air circulation and aisle space. In simple terms, this is determined by multiplying the number of meals served times portion size or weight, factored by the number of days between deliveries for each product classification.

3. *Poor space utilization.* Kitchen equipment plans reflect what occurs in one plane–the working surface height around 36". The high cost of space and the need for every area to work as efficient as possible, demands using every lineal foot of kitchen space in three levels-wall space, counter space, and space below the work surface. Equipment elevations and/or 3-D dimensional drawings should be part of every kitchen planning effort, to assist the owner and designer to visualize every inch of potential capacity from floor to ceiling.

4. *Lack of Vision.* Equipment and designs change rapidly and no one can be aware of every new concept or idea. However, just because a chef or manager isn't familiar with new ideas or technologies, it shouldn't be an excuse for failing to take advantage of new equipment. When planning a new or renovated facility, the success of your project depends on doing the research necessary to become aware of new equipment and other developments taking place. Attending trade shows, reading trade journals, meeting sales representatives and touring recently constructed facilities similar to yours should all be part of the planning process for both the owner and designer.

5. *Inadequate clearances.* A crisis occurs the first time a piece of equipment needs to be serviced when access or service clearance wasn't provided. Lack of ventilation, close proximity to other equipment generating grease laden vapor and/or high temperatures is often a contributing factor to the equipment failure. Proper clearances should be checked at every phase of a project–during design, installation and start-up. Since different manufacturers and models have a wide range of clearance requirements, it is important to check them first if you are considering substituting different equipment from the make and model that was originally specified or installed in that location.

6. *Selecting the wrong size or type of equipment for the intended task.* There is a wide range of sizes and capacities for

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almost every item of kitchen equipment. Selecting the wrong size or type can have a tremendous impact on the ability of the kitchen to produce the volume required during peak periods. If two or more items are prepared the same time period, the equipment size or quantities must accommodate multiple demands. Improper equipment sizing is often related to not having input from an operator or a chef in the design process. Never pick a piece of equipment based on the space available or what "worked on the last project". Calculating the capacity based on the menu and work task takes only a few minutes to assure that the correct size is selected.

7. *No provision for trash and soiled service items in work areas.* Busy food prep and cooking areas generate tremendous volumes of trash and soiled service items. In trying to maximum storage and production capacity, kitchens are often planned with wall-to-wall equipment. Aisles become the only place for trash containers. Trash containers and holding areas for bus tubs of soiled service pieces should be indicated on plans and elevations as an integral part of each work area. Denoting trash containers on the equipment schedule also summarizes the number and size of the containers that need to be purchased.

8. *Inadequate equipment to maintain proper holding temperature of*

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condiments, sauces, and toppings. Walk through any busy kitchen and note how many of the ingredients are sitting on top of counters or in food pans floating in melted ice water in bus tubs. Health departments are demanding cold ingredients be properly chilled at all times, yet counter top food holding areas are usually heated rather than refrigerated. Standard chefs tables in equipment catalogs often reflect designs that are 30 years old and may not even meet current health code requirements in many areas of the country.

9. *Inadequate space for clean dishes, silverware, linen and paper supplies.* A balanced kitchen layout with proper allocation for all functions will include storage space for dishes, silver, takeout containers and other support items in easy reach.

10. *Lack of landing areas and work space next to equipment, in particular, ranges fryers and refrigerators.* Well planned work stations are the result of a balance between production, storage and work/holding areas. A flat landing area called a spreader located between two ranges or fryers can be as valuable to the production process as the cooking equipment. One way to make sure both needs are accommodated is to use flat top ranges for spreaders or landing area. The cost difference between a neutral spreader and a hot top is minimal. The hot top may be used for stock pots during prep time, and for plating and landing during peak cooking times. Landing space for at least two sheet pans should be provided within a short distance of any oven. □

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