



LABOUR AUDIT GUIDE

Stop overstaffing. Reclaim your margins. Protect the guest experience.

A practical framework for diagnosing service, kitchen, support, and leadership labour.

MISE LOGIC CONSULTING



Before You Touch the Schedule

Managing a restaurant schedule is one of the most volatile balancing acts in hospitality. Spend too little on labour and service quality drops, guests leave frustrated, and the team burns out. Spend too much and profit quietly disappears.

This guide gives chefs, GMs, and ownership teams a practical diagnostic framework for finding labour leaks without cutting the soul out of the room. The goal is not fewer people at all costs. The goal is the right people, at the right times, doing the right work.

OPERATOR NOTE

Overstaffing by even 30 minutes per shift, repeated across a full week, can cost restaurants thousands by quarter-end. The leak usually hides in habits: early clock-ins, slow cuts, overly padded prep, loose routines, and schedules copied from last week instead of rebuilding for the actual demands of this week's services.

PULL THESE REPORTS BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ Hourly sales report from your POS
- ☐ Actual clock-in / clock-out labour report
- ☐ Guest count or cover count by daypart
- ☐ Discount, comp, and promotion report
- ☐ Product mix report for kitchen workload review

1. Labour Is a System, Not a Spreadsheet

A useful labour audit starts by separating the work into buckets. Servers, line cooks, hosts, prep cooks, dishwashers, bartenders, bussers, food runners, floor managers, and sous chefs do not create value in the same way. When they all get collapsed into one percentage, the diagnosis gets muddy.

Labour bucket	Who it includes	What it should protect
Revenue labour	Servers and line cooks actively producing guest spend.	Sales, service pace, ticket execution, and menu output.
Support labour	Hosts, bartenders, bussers, runners, expos, prep cooks, dishwashers, porters.	Flow, table turns, station readiness, clean resets, and reduced bottlenecks.
Leadership labour	Floor managers, AGMs, bar managers, sous chefs, CDC / EC coverage.	Standards, coaching, cuts, recovery, pacing, and accountability.
Invisible labour	Ordering, inventory, schedules, prep lists, menu updates, training documents.	System maintenance and operational follow-through.

CORE PRINCIPLE

A labour line is only too expensive when it is not creating results. The audit is not asking, "Can we cut this person?" It is asking, "What does this role unlock, protect, or prevent?"



2. The Holy Trinity of Labour Metrics

To run an optimized floor and kitchen, you cannot rely on one data point. Labour percentage tells you whether the schedule was profitable, but not whether the team was working at the right pace. SPLH tells you sales productivity, but it can be distorted by cheque average and selling skill. GPLH shows physical workload. Using all three together gives you a holistic view of what is actually happening and provides actionable insight that targets root causes shift by shift, week by week, instead of relying on a blanket solution, which rarely works.

Labour Cost % Labour Cost / Sales The profitability lens. Shows how much revenue is invested back into wages.	SPLH Sales / Labour Hours The efficiency lens. Shows dollar productivity of every hour invested.	GPLH Guests / Labour Hours The workload lens. Shows physical pace independent of cheque average or selling skill.
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WHAT THIS MIGHT ACTUALLY MEAN

When GPLH is on target but labour percentage is bleeding, the schedule may not be the problem. It may be sales training, menu pricing, discounting, cheque average, or missed upsell execution.

A Tale of Two Fridays

Assume a restaurant pays a minimum wage of \$18.25 per hour (B.C. minimum wage in 2026). On two consecutive Fridays, the manager schedules three servers for an eight-hour shift, creating 24 total revenue labour hours. On both nights, the restaurant serves exactly 195 guests.

Metric	Friday 1: Rookies	Friday 2: Veterans	Operational reality
Total Guests	195	195	Physical volume and workload were identical.
Labour Hours	24 hours	24 hours	The same schedule structure was deployed.
Average Guest Cheque	\$40.00	\$45.74	Veterans upsold, timed refills well, and drove premium-item sales.
Gross Sales	\$7,800.00	\$8,919.30	Friday 2 captured an extra \$1,119.30 in top-line revenue.
SPLH	\$325.00	\$371.63	Friday 2 looks more efficient from a sales perspective.
Labour Cost %	5.6%	4.9%	Friday 2 shows a lower labour cost ratio.
GPLH	8.125	8.125	Coverage and workload were identical. The gap is selling performance.

OPERATIONAL TAKEAWAY

If you review only Labour % and SPLH, Friday 1 looks like the weaker schedule. GPLH tells the truth: coverage and pace were identical. The rookie team did not fail on speed or floor coverage. They underperformed on selling. Strength of schedule therefore becomes a bigger part of the solution.



3. Gross Sales vs. Net Sales: The Metric Distortion Trap

One of the fastest ways to misread labour is to mix operational performance with promotional strategy. Gross Sales and Net Sales answer different questions. If they are treated as part of the same diagnostic, managers can get blamed for the wrong problem.

GROSS SALES MEASURES WORK

Gross Sales reflects the physical work the team performed. The kitchen still fired the food, the server still ran the table, and support staff still cleared the room, even if the guest received a discount or comp.

NET SALES MEASURES CASH

Net Sales reflects bankable revenue after discounts. It matters for cash flow, but it can punish managers for promotions, comps, or ownership-led pricing decisions that did not reduce the labour required to serve the guest.

The Mise Logic Standard

Evaluate management efficiency and schedule control using Gross Sales. Track the discount delta separately as a marketing, pricing, or guest recovery expense.

SOLVE THE RIGHT PROBLEM

If labour percentage is clean against Gross Sales but balloons against Net Sales, you likely do not have an overstaffing problem. You have a discounting, pricing, promotion, or price-integrity problem.

4. Service Labour: Coverage, Pace, and Selling Performance

Service labour is the easiest to oversimplify because servers touch sales directly. But a strong audit still needs to separate coverage from selling. A server can be moving at the right pace and still leave money on the table through missed drinks, weak menu guidance, poor refill timing, or low confidence with premium items.

Server Labour % FOH Revenue Labour / Sales Shows whether server coverage is financially sustainable.	Server GPLH Guests / Server Hours Shows whether the floor pace was realistic for the room.	Server SPLH Sales / Server Hours Shows sales productivity once coverage is accounted for.
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Signal	Likely diagnosis	Best first move
GPLH low + labour % high	Loose coverage or slow cuts.	Tighten start times, sections, and cut triggers.
GPLH on target + SPLH low	Selling issue, not a scheduling issue.	Coach ordering flow, menu language, drinks, and add-ons.
GPLH too high + complaints rising	Understaffed floor or weak support.	Add targeted support before adding more servers.
Strong SPLH + slow table turns	Servers selling, but flow is blocked.	Review host pacing, bussing, food running, bar speed, and manager deployment.

SERVICE AUDIT QUESTION

Were the servers physically overworked, financially underproductive, or blocked by missing support? Those are three different problems and they require three different fixes.



5. Kitchen Labour is Weighted Against Food Sales

The Mise Logic Standard

When evaluating kitchen labour, Mise Logic uses **food sales only** as the primary sales denominator.

THE WHY

This matters because the kitchen does not generate every dollar in the building. Bar sales, wine sales, beer sales, and most non-alcoholic beverage sales can dramatically inflate total revenue without adding a proportional amount of kitchen workload.

If kitchen labour is measured against total sales, the result can be misleading.

IN REAL TIME

Friday night with heavy cocktail, wine, and beer sales may make the kitchen look more efficient than it actually was. A quiet Monday with limited beverage sales may make the exact same kitchen schedule look worse, even if the food volume, ticket pacing, and station workload were perfectly reasonable.

The distortion becomes even larger seasonally. In the summer, patios often drive beverage-heavy revenue. In the winter, sales may shift back toward food-led dining. If kitchen labour is judged against total sales across both periods, the operator is not measuring kitchen efficiency. They are measuring the restaurant's beverage mix and calling it a kitchen labour result.

Scenario	Total Sales View	Food Sales View	What It Means
Monday, low beverage mix	Kitchen labour may look high.	More accurate.	Food volume drove the actual workload.
Friday, high beverage mix	Kitchen labour may look artificially low.	More accurate.	Bar sales inflated the denominator.
Summer patio season	Kitchen labour may look stronger than reality.	More accurate.	Drink-heavy revenue skews BOH performance.
Winter dining season	Kitchen labour may look weaker by comparison.	More accurate.	Less beverage mix changes the sales ratio.

6. Kitchen Labour: Production, Complexity, and PMIX Reality

Kitchen labour is harder to diagnose because the kitchen does not sell directly. A line cook's workload is hidden inside station setup, prep burden, ticket pacing, equipment constraints, product mix, and plating complexity. The same guest count can produce two completely different kitchen labour loads. Because of that, BOH labour needs four lenses: wage cost, sales supported, guest volume supported, and items produced.

BOH Labour %	Kitchen SPLH	GKPLH	IPLH
Kitchen Labour / Food Sales	Food Sales / Kitchen Hours	Guests / Kitchen Hours	Items Sold / Kitchen Hours
The profitability lens for kitchen wages.	Sales volume supported by each BOH hour.	Guest volume supported by each BOH hour.	Production volume, useful only when read with PMIX complexity.

READ THE FOUR KITCHEN LENSES TOGETHER

BOH Labour % = Kitchen Labour \$ / Food Sales

Kitchen SPLH = Food Sales / Kitchen Labour Hours

GKPLH = Guests / Kitchen Labour Hours

IPLH = Menu Items Sold / Kitchen Labour Hours

Sales context, guest volume, and production volume tell different truths. Read them together before cutting cooks or adding hours.



The Breakdown

Items Per Kitchen Labour Hour is a helpful diagnostic, not a verdict. Kitchen SPLH adds revenue context, GKPLH adds guest-volume context, and IPLH adds production context. Read all three alongside BOH Labour % before deciding whether the kitchen was loose, maxed out, under-selling, or carrying a more complex PMIX.

A Tale of Two Kitchens

Two Saturdays. Same covers. Same kitchen labour hours. Completely different product mix.

Metric	Saturday 1: Casual PMIX	Saturday 2: Complex PMIX	Operational reality
Guests	195	195	Guest volume was identical.
Kitchen Labour Hours	40	40	Same BOH schedule.
Gross Sales	\$7,800	\$8,919	The second night drove higher spend.
Kitchen SPLH	\$195.00	\$222.98	Saturday 2 supported more sales per BOH hour, despite moving fewer items.
Items Sold	420	260	Saturday 1 moved more individual items.
IPLH	10.5	6.5	Saturday 1 looks more productive on paper.
Menu Complexity	Lower	Higher	Saturday 2 carried heavier station load.
True Diagnostic	Volume-driven	Skill- and complexity-driven	Both shifts may have been correctly staffed.

KITCHEN TAKEAWAY

The question is not simply, "How many items did the kitchen produce?" The better question is: did the kitchen have the right number of skilled hands for the actual product mix being sold?

Kitchen Labour Diagnostic Framework

Kitchen signal	Likely diagnosis	Best first move
GKPLH low + labour % high	Too many BOH hours for the guest volume.	Stagger prep, line clock-ins, and close-down.
GKPLH normal + Kitchen SPLH low	The kitchen supported the right guest count, but the sales attached to that work were weak.	Review pricing, discounts, PMIX, cheque average, and server selling before cutting cooks.
GKPLH normal + IPLH low	Complex PMIX or station bottleneck.	Review item complexity, station load, and menu engineering before cutting.
Kitchen SPLH high + IPLH low	Fewer items may be acceptable if they are premium, complex, and profitable.	Compare gross profit dollars, ticket times, and station stress, not just item count.
Ticket times high + labour hours normal	Skill, station setup, or support problem.	Audit mise lists, station maps, expo flow, and training.
Line cooks doing prep during service	Prep system underbuilt or mis-timed.	Move prep to proper windows and protect service roles.

**RED FLAG**

When sous chefs and line cooks constantly absorb prep, dish, receiving, or deep cleaning, the restaurant may look lean on paper while quietly paying premium wages for support tasks.

7. Support Labour: The Hidden Multiplier

Support labour is often the first thing operators cut because it does not appear to generate revenue directly. But strong support labour can increase the earning capacity of the entire team. The right support role protects flow, table turns, food quality, station readiness, and closing speed.

THE SUPPORT LABOUR TEST

Do not ask only, "Is this person busy every minute?" Ask, "What breaks, slows down, or gets pushed onto higher-paid roles when this position is removed?"

Front-of-House Support Labour

Role	Measure against	Common leak	False economy when cut too hard
Hosts	Reservation pacing, wait-time accuracy, door control, table turns, guest handoff.	Scheduled before traffic exists or kept after door volume dies.	Managers or servers absorb the door, slowing table touches and recovery.
Bartenders	Beverage sales per hour, service-well volume, cocktail ticket times, bar-seat revenue.	Full bar team scheduled before the rush builds.	Dining room sales slow because every server depends on drink execution.
Bussers	Reset time, section capacity, dining room cleanliness, server selling time, closing speed.	Kept deep into the tail when table volume has collapsed.	Servers spend prime selling time clearing and resetting tables.
Food runners / expo	Food travel time, ticket consistency, refires, server availability, pass control.	Scheduled before kitchen volume needs them.	Food dies in the pass and servers leave the floor to run plates.

Back-of-House Support Labour

Role	Measure against	Common leak	False economy when cut too hard
Prep cooks	Prep hours per batch yield, line readiness, waste, 86s, product velocity.	Prep schedules built from habit rather than actual product movement.	Line cooks and sous chefs do prep at higher operational cost.
Dishwashers	Covers per dish hour, close-down time, smallware shortages, cleanliness, line interruption.	Dish labour scheduled too early before real volume builds.	Dish collapse slows plating, bar, service, and the close.
Porters / receivers	Order accuracy, storage discipline, prep handoff, waste prevention, station replenishment.	Receiving and storage spread randomly through the day.	Leaders and cooks get pulled off execution for avoidable admin and movement work.

DISH IS INFRASTRUCTURE

Dish is not a throwaway labour line. When dish collapses, the restaurant slows down everywhere: cooks wait for pans, bartenders wait for glassware, servers wait for resets, and the close drags.

8. Leadership Labour: Expensive Hands or Operational Leverage?

Leadership labour should not be judged only by whether the manager or sous chef looked busy. A leader can run around all night and still fail to create leverage. The question is whether their presence improved the shift.

Leadership role	Should create leverage through	Red flag	What it might mean
Floor manager	Guest recovery, table touches, cuts, pacing, sales coaching, deployment, comp control.	Spends the whole shift hosting, running food, and reacting.	Support labour may be missing, or the manager lacks a clear shift routine.
Bar manager	Beverage execution, service-well flow, ordering discipline, cocktail training, bar labour cuts.	Acts only as another bartender with a higher wage.	The role needs clearer ownership or better support structure.
Sous chef	Line readiness, prep accuracy, ticket control, station standards, coaching, waste, labour cuts.	Spends the whole shift filling gaps, doing prep, or washing dishes.	Prep systems, support labour, or station training may be underbuilt.
Chef / GM coverage	Standards, accountability, strategic cuts, coaching, future problem prevention.	Only solves the loudest immediate problem.	The operation may be relying on heroic effort instead of systems.

LEADERSHIP STANDARD

Leadership labour should not become expensive task labour. If leaders are constantly plugging gaps, the audit should identify the missing system, not praise the chaos.

LEADERSHIP AUDIT QUESTIONS

- ☐ Did the leader make timely cuts, or only react after labour was already spent?
- ☐ Did they coach selling, pacing, station setup, or standards during the shift?
- ☐ Did their presence reduce comps, ticket delays, close-down drag, or guest friction?
- ☐ Are they doing leadership work, or are they being used as the most expensive support role?

9. Finding Your Restaurant's Sweet Spot

Universal benchmarks are a trap. A high-volume brewpub, a fine-dining room, a resort restaurant, and a neighbourhood bistro all require different labour shapes. Your target should come from your own best shifts.

1	Isolate the Goldilocks shifts Audit the last 6 to 8 weeks. Find three or four shifts where the room felt right: ticket times held, guest feedback was strong, the team did not drown, and margins landed where they should.
2	Calculate the baseline by bucket Calculate targets for service labour, kitchen labour, support labour, and leadership labour separately. One blended labour percentage hides too much.
3	Map the red zones Compare upcoming schedules against the baseline. If projected workload falls too low, labour is loose. If it spikes too high, the guest experience and team stamina are at risk.



GPLH Target = Total Guests on Strong Shifts / Total Labour Hours

Your restaurant-specific workload benchmark

Baseline to build	Why it matters
Server GPLH by daypart	Shows whether floor coverage matches guest pace.
Kitchen guests per BOH hour	Shows whether the kitchen schedule matches real volume.
Kitchen SPLH by daypart	Shows how much revenue the kitchen supports per BOH hour without pretending the kitchen sold it directly.
Items per kitchen hour by PMIX type	Prevents simple-item shifts and complex-item shifts from being judged the same way.
Support hours per peak window	Shows how much infrastructure the room needs to flow.
Leadership coverage by risk window	Shows where management presence creates leverage instead of just cost.

10. The Hour-by-Hour Shift Audit Framework

Once the baseline is set, audit the schedule hour by hour. Place the actual labour curve beside the hourly sales and guest curve. Most leaks show up in three windows: the early open, the changeover gap, and the dragging close.

A. The Ghost-Town Open: Pre-Rush

Diagnostic: Review the 90 to 120 minutes before the main meal period. How many kitchen, floor, support, and leadership hours are clocked in before the restaurant actually needs them?

Leak: Bringing in the full line, full floor, or full leadership layer out of habit when the rush does not build until later.

Tweak: Stagger clock-ins in 15- to 30-minute increments. Protect the minimum setup crew, then layer in revenue, support, and leadership labour as volume becomes real.

B. The Mid-Afternoon Slide - Changeover Gap

Diagnostic: Review the 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM window. Guest volume often drops, but the labour curve does not always follow.

Leak: Keeping the full afternoon floor crew, prep crew, or manager overlap past their usefulness because mid-day cuts feel inconvenient or uncomfortable.

Tweak: Create volume-based cut triggers. When sales or GPLH fall below threshold for two consecutive half-hour segments, managers execute the next cut phase.

C. The Dragging Tail - Post-Rush Close

Diagnostic: Review the final 60 to 90 minutes before doors close. Watch for side-work, dish, prep, and close-down stretching to fill scheduled time.

Leak: Teams stand around or draw out cleaning because stations are not broken down in phases and leaders are not managing the close.

Tweak: Build phased pre-closing checklists. Close stations and side-work responsibilities sequentially as traffic falls, so the team is ready to clock out when the shift is actually done.



D. The Support Collapse - Peak Bottleneck

Diagnostic: Review the busiest 60 minutes of the shift. Did servers leave the floor to run food, managers get trapped at the door, line cooks run out of clean pans, or sous chefs abandon the pass to do prep?

Leak: The schedule may look lean because support roles were cut, but the restaurant pays for it through slower turns, lost sales, weaker execution, and longer closes.

Tweak: Add targeted support to the bottleneck before adding more revenue labour. One strong runner, busser, dishwasher, or prep cook can unlock the output of the whole team.

Once the baseline is set, audit the schedule hour by hour. Place the actual labour curve beside the hourly sales and guest curve. Most leaks show up in three windows: the early open, the changeover gap, and the dragging close.

11. Predictive Labour Forecasting: The Mise Logic Lab Solution

The Next Frontier: Meet Mise Logic Lab – Coming Soon to www.miselogiclab.com

Running manual hourly audits will save you thousands this month—but doing it every single week is a massive time sink. That’s why we’re developing **Mise Logic Lab**, an intelligent software layer that automates the heavy lifting.

By hardcoding **active prep times** into your batch recipes and mapping **plating complexity** onto your live service lines, Mise Logic Lab translates your POS product mix into a predictive, hour-by-hour scheduling blueprint. It tells you exactly how many prep and line hours your kitchen actually requires based on what your guests are ordering.

Traditional POS systems are good at telling you what sold. They are weaker at showing how much labour the menu required. Mise Logic Lab is being built to bridge that gap: recipe data, prep windows, product mix, plating complexity, and sales velocity feeding into smarter labour planning.

SMART PREP FORECASTING

For batch recipes - stocks, sauces, breading, butchery, mise - the system tracks active prep and cook time against a specific yield. That data can be paired with product velocity to forecast legitimate prep hours by day or week.

DYNAMIC LINE FORECASTING

For live service, the system maps plating time and component complexity across the menu. A multi-component entree carries a different labour load than a simple fried item. Forecasting should understand the relationship between Kitchen SPLH, GKPLH, IPLH, and PMIX complexity before a low item count is misread as weak labour performance.

SUPPORT LABOUR VISIBILITY

When prep, dish, hosts, bussers, runners, and bartenders are tracked as flow protection instead of miscellaneous labour, operators can see when support is saving money by keeping higher-value roles productive.

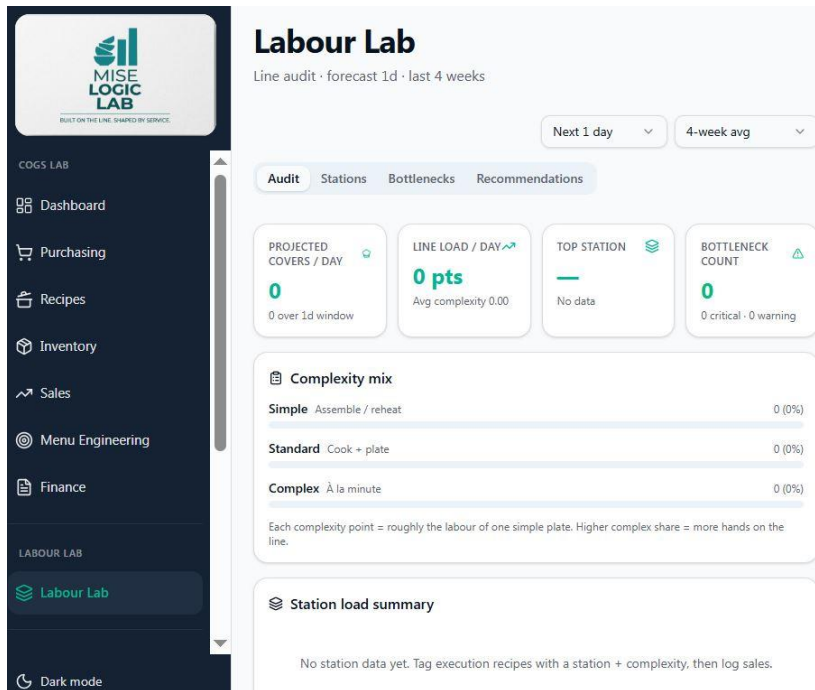
LEADERSHIP LABOUR CLARITY

When cuts, comp patterns, ticket delays, close-down times, and training follow-through are reviewed together, leadership labour can be evaluated by the leverage it creates, not just the hours it consumes.

WHY IT MATTERS

The goal is not to turn restaurants into spreadsheets. The goal is to give operators a cleaner view of the work they are actually asking the team to perform.

Traditional POS systems are good at telling you what sold. They are weaker at showing how much labour the menu required. Mise Logic Lab is being built to bridge that gap: recipe data, prep windows, product mix, plating complexity, and sales velocity feeding into smarter labour planning.



12. Stop Guessing. Start Optimizing.

You now have the core formulas, benchmarks, and audit windows to begin reclaiming labour margin. The harder part is finding the uninterrupted time to pull POS data, compare actual punches to scheduled labour, separate revenue work from support work, and rebuild the shift template while the restaurant keeps moving around you.

READY TO TURN THE AUDIT INTO ACTION?

Bring one week of recent hourly POS sales data and the matching labour schedule to a 15-minute strategy call. We will identify the top margin leaks, define the right baseline, and build one staggered clock-in or cut strategy you can test immediately.

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