

# The First Steps Toward Serving Line Transformation: Starting with Inspiration

Insights from Jason Carroll, Regional Senior Sales Manager, Lakeside® Manufacturing, Inc. and Multiteria® USA, LLC

Transformation in K-12 foodservice is not just necessary; it's becoming more essential every day as our students, schools, and communities evolve. But while many of us are eager to make positive changes—whether it's offering fresher meals, boosting sustainability, or addressing dietary needs—the pathway forward isn't always clear. Far too often, the first and hardest step is simply getting started.

In my experience, foodservice directors and operators face real barriers to change. For many, it comes down to more than just motivation or clarity. The biggest challenge is often financial: asking for funds to improve serving lines or launch a new program can feel daunting, especially for those in rural schools who may not get regular visits from manufacturers or outside support. On top of that, uncertainty about what steps to take first, and how to access stakeholders or resources, can make the whole process feel overwhelming. I've seen firsthand that having someone in your corner—someone who can educate, guide, and provide useful information—can make a world of difference.

Above all, I've learned that transformation always starts with inspiration. When we have something to visualize, the process becomes less intimidating. Inspiration guides and goal-setting resources aren't just “nice to have”—they're critical tools for anyone wondering what's possible and how to make it real. This document is our roadmap for taking those first, important steps. My goal is to help you find your voice, build your confidence, and empower you to walk into meetings with the clarity and resources you need to lead true transformation.

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## Why the First Step Feels So Hard

Many foodservice professionals struggle with taking the initial steps toward change, and it's not just because change is hard. It's because of factors like needing to request funding, overcoming historical frustrations with getting resources approved, or not knowing how to start a conversation with decision-makers. In rural schools especially, operators can feel isolated and overlooked—rarely visited by anyone outside their food vendors. Ultimately, the first step varies for every school, but the common denominator is a need for accessible support and actionable information. If you're facing these roadblocks, know that you're not alone, and you don't have to navigate them by yourself.

Finding a partner who's willing to listen, offer advice, and patiently walk you through the process—someone who gets what makes your community unique—makes initiating change feel less intimidating and much more achievable.

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## Actionable First Steps Toward Transformation

It's easy to feel overwhelmed when facing serving line challenges—especially if funding or clarity feels out of reach. That's why I believe inspiration guides designed for serving line projects are a crucial starting point. These guides go far beyond simple brochures; they give you and your team a concrete vision of what's possible in your own cafeteria, right from the start.

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## 1. Use Serving Line Inspiration Guides to Visualize and Persuade

A high-quality inspiration guide helps you imagine the transformation—showing not just generic layouts, but real solutions tailored for schools like yours. Detailed photos, before-and-after examples, and floor plan sketches let you and your stakeholders actually see how lines can move more efficiently, how layouts can become more welcoming, and what updated equipment could bring to your students. This visualization is powerful: when you walk into meetings with superintendents or school boards holding real-life examples and visual mock-ups, you give your ideas instant credibility and make it easier for others to share your vision.

**Pro Tip:** Ask your partners or vendors for inspiration guides that feature projects completed in similar-sized or nearby schools. Use these as “evidence” of what's possible in your own environment.

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## 2. Engage Your Team and Stakeholders

Serving line inspiration guides aren't just decision-making tools for directors—they're communication starters. You can use them during team meetings, student focus groups, or parent advisory sessions to spark honest conversations about what works and what needs to change. By flipping through pages together, stakeholders can point to features they like, voice concerns, and co-create the vision for your updated serving line. This approach ensures everyone feels ownership and brings valuable perspectives to the table.

**Pro Tip:** Let students and staff pick out preferred layouts or features from inspiration guides. Their enthusiasm often helps propel the project forward.

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## 3. Take Clear, Actionable Steps Toward Change

Inspiration guides break the process down into actionable priorities. Rather than guessing where to begin, you can use these resources as step-by-step blueprints—outlining the order of improvements, budgeting estimates, and even ideas for phased rollouts. They help you pinpoint problems, articulate solutions, and show what “success” will look like at every stage of the project.

**Pro Tip:** As you move forward, mark up your guide or workbook with notes, questions, and ideas. Treat it as your working document—your roadmap from first concept to finished, thriving serving line.

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## How Resources Drive Progress and Encourage Collaboration

Having examples, guides, and visual roadmaps isn't only about inspiration—it's about driving real, practical action. For directors unsure whether their current setup is working or what's possible, these tools provide clarity and spark new ideas. They transform a sense of uncertainty ("Can I really do this?") into confidence ("I can see what this will look like and show my community, too!").

Moreover, using a shared guide helps everyone get on the same page. It feeds productive discussions, keeps conversations grounded, and acts as a reference point throughout the project. Like a hardware store helping you build your own project layout, inspiration guides allow stakeholders to collaborate, tweak choices, and create a plan tailored to what your school truly needs.

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## **Push Forward with Confidence**

Transformation doesn't have to be intimidating or lonely. It's about taking small, purposeful steps, finding your voice, and working alongside people who are invested in your goals. Find the partner who is patient and help you prepare for every meeting—so you walk in with information, options, and real solutions, ready to be taken seriously. Remember: every effort, no matter how modest, adds to your credibility and moves your school's foodservice program closer to success.

You don't have to do this alone. If you can visualize the future, build supportive partnerships, and stay patient with the process, you'll set the stage for lasting change. Start with what feels achievable now, collect inspiration, and involve your team every step of the way.

**Together, we can empower each other, strengthen our voices, and transform K-12 foodservice— from concept to installation – one inspired and intentional step at a time.**

If you'd like a digital PDF of our starter Serving Line Inspiration Guide, feel free to reach out!

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Jason Carroll

**Regional Senior Sales Manager, Lakeside and Multiteria**

4900 West Electric Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI

**Phone:** (612) 297-8342

**Email:** [LakesideMarketing@elakeside.com](mailto:LakesideMarketing@elakeside.com)

### **About The Author:**

Having 30 years of experience in the construction industry, Jason brings a unique perspective in dealing with Lakeside and Multiteria clients. Jason has worked closely with many companies ranging from dealers, general contractors, architects and building owners in that time. His career has been built on creating paths to connect good people and adding the value of great products.