




MBC

## THE CULINARY PROFESSIONAL

The culinary profession encompasses artistic endeavors, managerial and administrative work, practical skills, and leadership. The goal of any professional, no matter what the profession, is to uphold the standards of excellence, to provide the best possible service to the public, and to foster a sense of camaraderie and inclusion for all members of the profession.



A CONSTANT FOCUS ON HIGH CULINARY STANDARDS AND EXECUTION OF THOSE STANDARDS IS THE HALLMARK OF A CULINARY PROFESSIONAL. AS YOU WILL SEE, THERE ARE OTHER ATTRIBUTES SUCH AS COMMITMENT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND JUDGMENT THAT ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF ALL PROFESSIONALS, BUT FOR THE CULINARY PROFESSIONAL IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE CULINARY CRAFT.

## THE CULINARY PROFESSIONAL

The cardinal virtues of the culinary professional are an open and inquiring mind, an appreciation of and dedication to quality wherever it is found, and a sense of responsibility. Success also depends on several character traits; although some of these may be inherent in certain individuals, usually these traits must be diligently cultivated throughout a career. These traits include

*Commitment to the profession.* No matter what his or her current job description, a true professional is driven to provide the best possible experience to the guest. The degree to which a food-service professional can offer a high-quality product, as well as complete customer satisfaction, is the degree to which he or she will succeed in providing excellent service.

*A sense of fairness and responsibility.* Chefs have a specific responsibility to provide the customer with well-prepared and wholesome food, excellent service, and a fair value. This includes the knowledge of where foods have come from, an awareness of and willingness to accommodate special needs, the ability to work with producers and purveyors to maintain quality at all levels, and the drive to develop a strong team approach to the operation.

*Sound judgment.* Good judgment is a prerequisite for becoming and remaining a professional. The ability to judge what is right and appropriate in each work situation is developed throughout a lifetime of experience. Taking others' needs into consideration is more than just polite—it also creates a working atmosphere in which a problem can be understood and resolved fairly.

## THE CHEF AS A BUSINESSPERSON

Leadership, perhaps the single most important trait that a chef can develop, is an elusive concept. A leader's role is to inspire employees so that they want to come to work. A leader creates an environment where everyone feels a part of the team. The effort of each team member contributes to the success of the organization.

For some, leadership comes naturally. That doesn't mean that others can't become leaders. A leader is confident in his or her role and has developed a personal philosophy that guides him or her through daily challenges. A leader with a strong philosophy and the ability to articulate that philosophy possesses the foundation necessary to create an organizational vision.

A leader's vision for the business will help all team members understand where they are going. It may not describe how to get there, but it certainly will point everyone in the right direction. The chef starts with a clear vision for the culinary team and follows up with strong leadership to achieve the vision and goals.



Once an overall goal or plan has been laid down, the next tasks are to implement and track that plan. These tasks are primarily administrative in nature. Some administrative duties may not sound at all glamorous—preparing schedules, tracking deliveries, computing costs, and so forth. The best administrators are those who can create a feeling throughout the entire staff that each person has a stake in getting things done correctly. When you give people the opportunity to help make decisions and provide them with the tools they need to perform optimally, it is easier to achieve the goals you have established on an executive level.

Learn to use the important tools of an administrator; budgets, accounting systems, and inventory control systems all play a role. Many organizations, from the largest chains to the smallest one-person catering company, rely upon software systems that allow them to efficiently administer a number of areas: inventory, purchases, losses, sales, profits, food costs, customer complaints, reservations, payroll, schedules, and budgets. If you are not using a system capable of tracking all this information and more, you cannot be as effective as you need to be.

## Managing Physical Assets

Physical assets are the equipment and supplies needed to do business. In the case of a restaurant, these might include food and beverage inventory, tables, chairs, linens, china, flatware, glassware, computers and point-of-sale systems, cash registers, kitchen equipment, cleaning supplies, and ware-washing machines. When we talk about managing physical assets, we are considering how anything that you must purchase or pay for affects your ability to do business well.

## Managing Time

It may seem that no matter how hard you work or how much planning you do, the days aren't long enough. Learning time-management skills and regularly evaluating your operation to make the best possible use of time are essential to your career development. Some of the most common causes of wasted time are a lack of clear priorities, a lack of essential tools, poor staff training, poor communication, and poor organization.



Reviewing daily operations regularly can help you resolve these problems. Consider the way you, your coworkers, and your staff spend the day. Does everyone have a basic understanding of which tasks are most important? Do they know when to begin a particular task in order to complete it on time?

## Managing People (or Managing Communications)

By training your staff properly, you will create an organization that is a model of efficiency. Give your staff members the yardsticks they need to evaluate each job and determine whether they have done exactly what was requested in the appropriate fashion and amount of time.

Whether you are training a new employee, introducing a new menu item, or ordering a piece of equipment, clear communication is also important in maintaining efficiency. Be specific and use the most concise language you can without leaving out any necessary information; this can help ensure that all staff members understand what is being communicated. If tasks are handled by a number of people, be sure to write each task out, from the first step to the last. Encourage people to ask questions if they don't understand you.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULINARY PROFESSIONALS



Culinary professionals are needed not just in hotel dining facilities and traditional restaurants but in a variety of other settings as well—public and private, consumer-oriented, and institutional. An increased emphasis on nutrition, sophistication, and financial and quality control means that all settings, from the white-tablecloth restaurant to the fast-food outlet, offer interesting challenges. An increasing number of culinary professionals find meaningful work in the catering sector. The advantages are significant and the opportunities are more exciting than ever before.

On-site and off-premise catering (used in institutions such as schools, hospitals, colleges, airlines, and business and industry) used to have a specific and not very flattering profile. Meals were prepared in bulk, portioned onto trays, and delivered to the guests. Today, as clients become increasingly sophisticated in their food choices, this scenario is being replaced by an approach more similar to that found in à la carte restaurants. While the menu selections are based on the needs of the guests, there is a growing acceptance of foods that are ethnic or regional in nature. Health concerns are another factor.

Caterers provide a particular service, often tailored to a special client for a particular event, whether it be a wedding, a cocktail reception, or a gallery opening. Caterers may provide on-site services (the client comes to the caterer's premises), off-site services (the caterer comes to the client's premises), or both. (For more about special events, see Chapter 2.)

## THE KITCHEN BRIGADE SYSTEM

The brigade system was instituted by Georges-Auguste Escoffier to streamline work in hotel kitchens and eliminate the chaos that could result when workers did not have clear-cut responsibilities. Each position's responsibilities are clearly defined under this system. In smaller operations or in situations where skilled personnel are not readily available, the classic system may be condensed so as to make the best use of workspace and talents. The introduction of new equipment for the professional kitchen has helped to alleviate some of the problems associated with smaller staffs.



In any professional kitchen, the chef is responsible for all kitchen operations, including ordering, supervision of all stations, and development of menu items. He or she may also be known as the chef de cuisine or executive chef. The sous chef is second in command, answers to the chef, and fills in for the chef when needed. He or she may be responsible for scheduling, and assists the station chefs (or line cooks) as necessary. Small operations may not have a sous chef. The positions in a classic brigade also include the following:

The sauté chef (saucier) is responsible for all sautéed items and their sauces. This position is often considered the most demanding, responsible, and glamorous on the line.

The fish chef (poissonier) is responsible for fish items, often including fish butchering, and their sauces. This position is sometimes combined with the saucier position.

The roast chef (rôtisseur) is responsible for all roasted foods and related jus or other sauces.

The grill chef (grillardin) is responsible for all grilled foods. This position may be combined with the rôtisseur position.

The fry chef (friturier) is responsible for all fried foods. This position may be combined with the rôtisseur position.

The vegetable chef (entremetier) is responsible for hot appetizers and frequently has responsibility for soups, vegetables, and pastas and other starches. (In a full, traditional brigade system, soups are prepared by the soup chef or potager, vegetables by the legumier.) The person in this position may also be responsible for egg dishes.

The roundsman (tournant), or swing cook, works as needed throughout the kitchen.

The cold-foods chef (garde manger), also known as the pantry chef, is responsible for the preparation of cold foods, including salads, cold appetizers, pâtés, and the like. This is considered a separate category of kitchen work.

The butcher (boucher) is responsible for butchering meats, poultry, and, occasionally, fish. The butcher may also be responsible for breading meat and fish items.

The pastry chef (pâtissier) is responsible for baked items, pastries, and desserts. The pastry chef frequently supervises a separate kitchen area or a separate shop in larger operations. This position may be further broken down into the following areas of specialization: confiseur (candies and petits fours), boulanger (unsweetened doughs, as for breads and rolls), glacier (frozen and cold desserts), and décorateur (showpieces and special cakes).

The expediter or announcer (aboyeur) accepts orders from the dining room and relays them to the various station chefs. This individual is the last person to see the plate before it leaves the kitchen. In some operations, this may be either the chef or sous chef.

The communal prepares the meal served to the staff (sometimes called the family meal) at some point during the shift.

The apprentice (commis) works under a station chef to learn about the operations and responsibilities of the station.