



# CREATING YOUR CULINARY CAREER



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# A CULINARY CAREER

**BEFORE STARTING YOUR CULINARY CAREER**, it is a good idea to take a moment to consider exactly what that might mean. Undertaking a career in the culinary arts means participating in a remarkable history. As Jared Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, notes, the types and quantities of foods available to various groups throughout history has had a profound influence on the development of society and of various cultures' abilities to grow and advance. Moreover, while we may not have exact records of who first learned to harvest rice and boil it, or who first sampled an oyster, we can be certain that as soon as groups of people gathered into communities, there was cooking going on.

Today, when the culinary arts come under discussion, the picture that first comes to mind is that of a restaurant chef dressed in a white jacket and checkered pants and wearing a toque blanche — the tall, pleated, white chef’s hat. There is a tradition of excellence, an aura of authority surrounding anyone rightly referred to as “chef.”

It would be hard to describe the “typical” job in the culinary field. In fact, many have taken to using the term *culinarian* to describe the broad scope of jobs this industry now encompasses. In addition, the talented pool of professionals clearly demonstrates that there are plenty of exciting, rewarding, and challenging jobs where you can put your personal strengths to use.

## *Attributes of a Culinary Professional*

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Each member of a profession is responsible for the profession’s image, whether he or she is a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or culinarian. We take it as a given that someone dedicating themselves to a career in the culinary field is passionate about food and service. Beyond that, however, there are other important attributes.

You will find people who are detail driven and precise, and others who are dynamic problem solvers. Some are great with numbers. Others have a way with people. There is plenty of work for the scientifically minded with a bent for research. People work in for-profit businesses as well as nonprofit. There are individually owned enterprises and international corporations.

Creative individuals may find that occupations such as food writing, food photography, or catering offer the challenges and rewards needed for a stimulating career. There are career tracks for those with a strong corporate or management inclination as well as for those more free-spirited entrepreneurs.

One of the cardinal virtues of any culinary profession is an open and inquiring mind, as well as an appreciation of and dedication to quality wherever it is found and a sense of responsibility. Success also depends on several character traits, some of which are inherent, and some of which are diligently cultivated throughout a career. These include:

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- **Commitment to service** *The degree to which a foodservice professional can offer a quality product, as well as thorough customer satisfaction, is the degree to which that professional will succeed in providing excellent service.*
  - **Sense of responsibility** *The responsibility of a culinary professional includes respecting not just the customer and his or her needs but also the staff, food, equipment, and facility.*
  - **Sound judgment** *The ability to judge what is right and appropriate in each work situation is acquired throughout a lifetime of experience; good judgment is a prerequisite for becoming and remaining a professional.*
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At the time that this book went to press, the National Restaurant Association estimated that there were about 13 million people employed in the foodservice industry, and that there would be an additional 1.3 million jobs created by the year 2020. Many of these jobs will fall into some traditional segments, notably hotels and restaurants. However, a great many jobs are to be found in areas that you may not have considered. There are plenty of ways to find a good direction in this field. This quick overview should be just a jumping-off point.

## *Traditional Restaurants*

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Auguste Escoffier and César Ritz were directly responsible for making the restaurant an acceptable and even desirable place for everyone, men and women alike, to dine and to be seen. By the time that the Savoy Hotel in London became an acceptable part of life, it had changed forever the way in which the public viewed restaurants. No longer simply stopping places for weary travelers, or clubs for men, restaurants had started on the path to becoming what they are today. Restaurants today run a gamut from fine-dining operations to quick-service or casual chains. The type of cuisine, the style of menu and service, as well as the operating philosophy of the establishment play a crucial role in determining the structure of any specific restaurant.

The size of the kitchen staff can range from one person to a large group, classically known as the “brigade.” The size of the kitchen staff is determined equally by the number of meals the restaurant commonly serves and the extensiveness of the menu. The number of people actually employed in a kitchen will vary greatly from one operation to the next. The organization detailed on pages 6–8 is suitable for a very large operation, such as a hotel. In most circumstances, the responsibilities of any given position may be changed to accommodate a smaller staff.

## **À la Carte Kitchens**

In an à la carte kitchen, the staff needs to be able to prepare a wide number of items at any given moment. Adequate *mise en place* (in other words, the basic stocks, sauces, soups, and other foods that are cut, seasoned, and prepared ahead of time so that menu items can be prepared quickly) must be kept on hand. However, the actual preparation of a meal is begun only when an order comes from the dining room into the kitchen, so that all food is cooked to order (at that moment or *à la minute*).

The chef in charge of a kitchen has a wide range of responsibilities. The chef oversees the operation of the entire kitchen, and he or she is ultimately responsible for the food and the service offered by an establishment. To this person falls the responsibility for developing and maintaining the standards of preparation and service of food, in accordance with the practices of the company or facility. The chef develops menus and, where necessary and appropriate, develops and tests recipes to ensure that all menu items are properly and consistently prepared.

## **Banquet Kitchens**

Many large venues count on conventions, meetings, and special events such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, and receptions to generate a large part of their revenue. The banquet staff, from the chef to the servers, is crucial to the success or failure of this part of the operation. A banquet kitchen has pressures that are far different from those found in an à la carte kitchen. In a banquet kitchen, the problem is to feed large numbers of people all at the same time as



*Working in a banquet setting*

quickly as possible. Foods must be prepared in large batches, as close to service time as possible.

The ability to organize an incredible number of details is paramount. This might include making sure that there are enough tables for a buffet or enough champagne tulips to serve during the intermezzo; hiring or preparing an ice carving; and coordinating with the bakeshop to make sure that the roses on the wedding cake and the linens match the color of the bridesmaids' gowns.

## Commissary Kitchens

Commissary kitchens need to produce large quantities of foods and then package them appropriately so that they can withstand transportation and at least some storage time. Then they can be transported to the correct site, where they will be finished close to service time. Commissary kitchens are common in settings such as school foodservice and chain restaurants.

## Kitchen Hierarchy

The brigade system was instituted by Escoffier to streamline and simplify work in hotel kitchens. It served to eliminate the chaos and duplication of effort that could result when workers did not have clear-cut responsibilities. Under this system, each position has a station and defined responsibilities. In smaller operations, the classic system is generally abbreviated and responsibilities are organized to make the best use of workspace and talents. A shortage of skilled personnel has also made modifications in the brigade system necessary. The introduction of new equipment has helped to alleviate some of the problems associated with smaller kitchen staffs.

The chef is responsible for all kitchen operations, including ordering, supervision of all stations, and development of menu items. He or she also may be known as the “chef de cuisine” or “executive chef.” The sous chef is second in command, answers to the chef, may be responsible for scheduling, and fills in for the chef and assists the station chefs (or line cooks) as necessary. Small operations may not have a sous chef. The range of positions in a classic brigade also includes many others, as follows.

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**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.

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**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.

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

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

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

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**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 station or potager, vegetables by the *legumier*.) This station may also be responsible for egg dishes.

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

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**The cold-foods chef (*garde manger*)**, also known as the “pantry chef,” is responsible for preparation of cold foods, including salads, cold appetizers, pâtés, and the like. This is considered a separate category of kitchen work. (For more detailed descriptions of the *garde manger*, see page 11.)

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**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* (prepares candies and petits fours), *boulangier* (prepares unsweetened doughs, as for breads and rolls), *glacier* (prepares frozen and cold desserts), and *décorateur* (prepares showpieces and special cakes). (For more about baking and pastry, see pages 21–26.)

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**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 the sous chef.

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**The *communard*** prepares the meal served to the staff at some point during the shift (also called the “family meal”).

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**The commis, or apprentice,** works under a station chef to learn the function and responsibilities of a specific station on the line.

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## **Cold Foods, Garde Manger, and Banquet Work**

In the same way that there are positions on the hot line, and a hierarchy of power, so too are there in the cold kitchen. The areas of responsibility in the cold kitchen are more varied than one might imagine. They include breakfast cookery (eggs, home fries, toasts, cereals, and muffins), cold salads, cold hors d'oeuvre, smoked items, marinated foods, pâtés, and terrines. All of these items are of great importance in most professional kitchens.

### Breakfast Cook

A skilled breakfast cook is indispensable in a restaurant, hotel, coffee shop, diner, inn, or bed-and-breakfast. Not so long ago, “eggs any style, choice of bacon or sausage, home fries, juice, and coffee” were all anyone really needed to know about breakfast.

The talented breakfast chef of today must possess the same skills as a sauté cook. The ability to prepare several items at once, with split-second timing, is of paramount importance. Breakfast is generally not as leisurely a meal as dinner or even lunch.

The range of foods that must be prepared for breakfast also calls a number of skills into play. There are hot cereals, eggs in a variety of styles, vegetables, fruit compotes and fruit plates, blintzes, pancakes, crêpes, waffles, muffins, and other breads as well. These are items that, for the most part, need to be prepared as close as possible to service time. Moreover, as Americans become ever more flexible in their understanding of what constitutes breakfast food, the chance for creativity is constantly expanding.

### Pantry Cook

The responsibilities of the pantry cook will differ depending upon the type of operation under discussion. In general, however, this station is responsible for preparing a wide range of salads, salad dressings, cold hors d'oeuvre and appetizers, and cold desserts.

If there is no formal banquet kitchen, the pantry cook also may assist the chef in determining what types of foods would be appropriate for a reception or buffet. The challenge to produce attractive, appealing foods while keeping food costs low is one that the truly skilled pantry cook will face repeatedly. For some people, it is like solving an infinitely challenging and constantly changing puzzle.

## Butchers and Charcutières

The butcher is responsible for a wide variety of food preparation, and though it is less common to find this as a separate station in all but the largest operations, a well-trained butcher can find a position virtually anywhere in the country, in restaurants as well as with specialty shops or purveyors. Specialty butchering is a skill that is harder and harder to find, while at the same time demand is growing for meats that are trimmed and cut in such a way as to keep them in line with current standards. Locally grown and butchered meats are also in great demand on many menus.

Charcutières prepare a wide array of meat products, including sausages, bacon, hams, and terrines. They are typically involved in all aspects of meat preparation as well as curing, drying, and smoking techniques. This has become an area of great interest as consumers search out locally made, handcrafted foods. *Salumerias* (the Italian name for shops that offer a wide array of cured meats like bacon or prosciutto, sausages, and other specialty meat products) have grown in popularity. Chefs that enter this field are typically driven by an interest in fine-quality foods, as well as a fascination with the science behind how and why foods evolve from their fresh to their cured form.

Obviously, the amount and type of work done by a skilled butcher is varied. However, in many single-unit restaurant operations, there is no butcher. This means that some other position, either the chef or one of the line cooks, will assume this work. On the other hand, it may mean that the restaurant will opt to buy meats and fish already trimmed and cut into portion sizes. The additional cost may be warranted if there is no one with enough skill to perform this work, but the added cost of the meats and fish purchased in this way can be very great indeed.



*Garde manger*

## Garde Manger Chef

The chef in charge of the cold station must be able to prepare a wide range of foods, and often this station will be responsible for the butchering of meats and fish, unless there is a separate butcher station. (Usually it is only very large operations that will have a separate butcher station, as explained previously.)

The garde manger chef has a number of responsibilities, among them to understand which foods are best when prepared in a cold fashion, how and when to marinate foods, how smokers work, what the effect of brining and smoking would be on the food, and how best to arrange and display the items.

## *Catering and Events*

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Whenever people gather for several hours, they are going to require food and beverages. At business meetings, coffee, tea, and bottled water — at the very least — are made available for attendees. Celebratory occasions such as weddings, christenings, birthday parties, bar and bat mitzvahs, and anniversaries call for special food and drink to complete the festivities. These are all prime occasions for catering.

From a meal in a prestigious stadium skybox to a mobile lunch wagon on a movie set, catering can be bone china elegant or paper plate casual, but it always means serving good-quality food and drink to many people. Several things distinguish a catering operation from a restaurant.

Catering is usually done by prearranged contract — food and drink provided at a certain cost to a specific number of people. The menu at a catered event is usually more limited than a restaurant menu and is chosen in advance by the client.

The banquet chef must be able to wear a great many hats. He or she will determine what sort of hors d'oeuvre would be appropriate for a reception. He or she also must be able to arrange various styles of buffets, and present the foods in a graceful and appropriate fashion, as well as to determine how best to serve the food, whether that would be by passing the items “butler-style” or by arranging them on a display.

- Excellent organizational skills
- Time management skills
- The ability to multitask
- A friendly, hospitable personality
- The ability to manage stress
- An extensive knowledge of ingredients
- A high level of written and verbal communication skills
- Natural leadership and motivational skills
- A knowledge of social and religious cultures and customs
- Excellent networking skills
- Proficiency in basic accounting principles
- Basic mechanical skills
- Good negotiating skills

Event planners are often involved in several aspects of a function and rely a great deal upon their managerial skills. They may be called upon to interact with the client during planning stages or to arrange additional services beyond those of food and drink, such as photographers or audio-visual supports. They arrange for the staffing of the event as well as any training that their staff may require. In addition, they may arrange for the rental of chairs, tables, linen, china, and all the other necessary accoutrements for the event. They may need to look the site over carefully to determine whether there will be sufficient parking for the guests and the staff. The amount of detail work required to develop a comprehensive list of rental items and a suitable menu is staggering, unless you are extremely organized.

To be a successful caterer, you also need to be able to visualize the entire affair from beginning to end, mentally walking through all the phases of the event. By doing that, you may find that you forgot to order trays or ice tubs for the drinks, beverage napkins, or enough forks to get through the salad course, the entrée, and the dessert. If you are planning to give champagne to 400 people and do not have champagne glasses, the chances of finding someone able to bail you out at the last moment are slim. However, if you rehearse how the party will run, you will raise a champagne glass to give a toast, compare that action against one of your many lists, and realize the problem in time to avert disaster.

There are two main categories of catering:

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- **Institutional** *These caterers at hospitals, universities, airlines, large hotels, and retirement centers provide a wide variety of food and drink to a large number of people on an ongoing basis — usually at the institution itself. The institution typically contracts with a catering company to have this service provided.*
  - **Social** *These caterers provide food and beverage services to civic groups, charities, corporations, businesses, and individuals either on premise at a catering or banquet hall or off premise at a selected location. Hotels and convention centers may have an entire staff devoted to banquets and catering, with the banquet chef heading the kitchen operations and the banquet manager in charge of the sale of the event as well as managing the service and staffing for an event.*
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If you think that catering might be a great career option for you, check your skills against the qualities that a successful caterer ought to have (see sidebar). See how you fit in, or find those areas in which you will need more education or help.

## Volume Cooking

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Cooking for institutions such as school cafeterias, day care centers, airlines, or jails is a career path that many people overlook. The word *institutional* may not have exactly the right connotation for them. Actually, however, working in volume or institutional feeding can be every bit as challenging, creative, and rewarding as working in a white-tablecloth restaurant.

There are distinct advantages to working in volume, contract, or institutional settings. Often, your hours will be regular, and you will very likely not have to work on weekends or holidays. School cafeterias, for instance, usually close during winter, spring, and summer breaks. The opportunity

to learn additional skills is readily available; for instance, you may be able to learn about purchasing for large organizations, which could eventually lead to an excellent position as a steward or purchasing agent for a school, hospital, or other institution.

Finally — and this is the advantage that often catches the eye of many people — larger organizations can afford to offer their employees a very appealing benefits package. It may include such things as paid vacations, sick days, personal time, medical and dental insurance, life insurance, and even profit sharing. These benefits are not always possible in smaller operations. If you have a family, look at what the costs would be for life and health insurance if you had to get these things on your own.

Volume feeding is done in a wide range of settings, and the volume can range from a few hundred people to several thousand. Following are some of the avenues open to those pursuing a career in volume or institutional feeding.

## **Schools, Colleges, and Universities**

Most schools have some sort of on-site cafeteria. Larger schools, colleges, and universities may have a variety of foodservice operations on campus, including a traditional cafeteria, a fast-food-style restaurant, a coffee shop, or other options.

Very often, a large organization that handles the foodservice operation of several schools will be in charge. In that case, the managers will have received training from the parent organization. (Sodexo and Aramark are two such organizations that operate nationwide.)

The chef or chef/manager is responsible for developing menus or for implementing the menus that are developed by the company itself. There are usually modifications required, and there is the inevitable need to work with the students who are the ultimate consumers of the food. They will have specific demands and requests as well. The area of the country will play a part, as will the economic profile of the school.

In addition to overseeing the production of the menus, the chef also will be required to schedule the workers. The division of work in the kitchen for a school foodservice operation is much like it would be for any other kitchen. There will be breakfast cooks, pantry (salad) workers, and hot-line

cooks who will prepare the food that is served on the cafeteria line. There may be a separate bakeshop as well that prepares a variety of items, including desserts.

Then there is the dish-room staff, the servers who plate up and serve the food on the line, and other maintenance and service staff. Very often, the less skilled jobs are filled by student workers.



*Volume cooking*

## Hospitals

It is a curious phenomenon that institutions dedicated to healing people have such a notoriously poor reputation when it comes to feeding them. The problem in the past may have had to do with the fact that decisions about food were left in the hands of dietitians. These trained professionals certainly know about what foods are best. However, they are seldom skilled at making those foods appealing to someone who may have very little else to look forward to over the course of the day.

The kitchen staff in a hospital will need to work closely with the dietitians and the physicians to make sure that the needs of patients are met. The foods that are prepared and served to patients are a part of the total care that they are receiving, and these foods can have a strong impact on patients' morale.

## Assisted Living Centers

Throughout the country, more and more people are moving into assisted-living centers. The level of assistance can vary greatly, but one of the popular features at any facility is foodservice. While the food at these types of places has often been the butt of culinary jokes, the fact is that the centers are starting to fill up with Baby Boomers, who are used to a certain lifestyle. Many of them may already be committed to a healthy lifestyle that includes plenty of good food and exercise. Of course, as they age, their lifestyle often needs to morph a little to deal with the effects of aging, including diseases as well as physical changes that can have an impact on their eating behavior.

## Nursing Homes

As people age, they gradually lose their sense of hearing and their sense of sight. However, it is rare for them to lose their sense of smell or their ability to taste and enjoy foods. If hospitals have endured countless jokes about how poor their food is while nursing homes have largely escaped notice, it is probably because comedians, who may have been to a hospital on occasion, have seldom checked into nursing homes for extended stays.

There are various physical ills that can beset the elderly, and these will certainly change the kinds of foods that they are able to eat. If they have no teeth, or only poorly and loosely fitted dentures, foods that require a good firm bite may be out of the question. In addition, if their physical condition calls for a modification of the diet — for instance, controlling the amount of cholesterol or sodium in their food — this will have an effect as well. Still, there is a great deal of opportunity to make sure that the foods prepared and served to residents of nursing homes are wholesome, nutritious, and interesting. In addition, many people may take a special satisfaction in caring for the elderly or invalids.

## **Armed Forces**

A large number of people who have entered the foodservice industry in the private-business sector have done so after learning their skills in the armed forces. Mess halls are not the only dining options, and it is more than possible to learn a great deal about food preparation, even food preparation of the highest caliber, in the armed forces.

The range of work in the armed forces for kitchen personnel is identical to what might be expected in a very large, very well-organized hotel chain. There are executive chefs, chefs, sous chefs, line cooks, pantry cooks, and bakers.

## **Correctional Centers**

City, county, state, and federal prisons have to feed their inmates. They have a responsibility, on a human level, to the prisoners to ensure that their physical needs of clothing, shelter, and food are supplied. They have an equal obligation to the taxpayers who must finance penal institutions to try to keep their efforts within a specified budget.

The challenge for the director of the foodservice operation is to make sure that three wholesome meals are served each day. It is important to learn how to get and use commodity items available through government programs, how to buy in bulk, and how to produce large amounts of food quickly and efficiently. This type of work is not for everyone, but it can be a rewarding job for some.

## *The Front of the House*

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Great service requires great service personnel. In an industry devoted to the culinary arts, the professional staff that directly interacts with the guests is critical to the business's success. A great kitchen staff deserves a great dining room staff. For most restaurants, this means having a great dining room manager and a service staff that is constantly learning about the foods they serve.



*The front of the house*

You may find that your interest in the culinary arts finds its best expression in the front of the house, where you can have more direct contact with the guests. The dining room manager or banquet manager with a culinary background brings a special knowledge to her or his work. This person is often better able to coordinate work with the kitchen to the benefit of all concerned.

Restaurants that pride themselves on their wine lists usually employ a sommelier, who is an expert on wine and wine service. This expertise, married with a well-rounded knowledge of food and the culinary arts, assures that the guests who visit the restaurant have a great array of selections. But, more importantly, it means that the sommelier is able to give each one of his or her service staff the training and information necessary to give each guest service worthy of both the wine and the food.

There is a wide range of different restaurants in the United States today, running the gamut from expensive to family style. The front-of-house work demanded by each type of restaurant will vary, depending in part upon the demands of the clientele and the menu.

## **Fine Dining, Free Standing**

White-tablecloth restaurants generally are considered the upper end of the restaurant ranking system. They are more refined, elegant, and polished than other restaurants. They also offer more upscale service along with menus featuring excellent (and often unusual) foods, wines, and other amenities. They tend to be more expensive for the guests and higher paying for the staff.

The staff in these restaurants is usually highly skilled and has had a significant amount of experience working in hotel and restaurant operations where the food and service is of the highest quality.

## **Multi-Unit and Chain Restaurants**

These restaurants usually have menus that appeal to families because they offer familiar food, salad bars, and low prices. The foods here are very often prepared fully or partially in a commissary, or central kitchen.

While service in these dining rooms may not demand the same level of skill as in a white-tablecloth restaurant, these establishments do offer a management track with the potential for advancement.

## Dining Room Hierarchy

Every establishment has its own variation on the classic dining room brigade depending upon the type and price level of the menu, style of service, and physical structure of the restaurant.

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**The dining room manager** (occasionally referred to as the “maitre d”) is responsible for the overall management of the dining room: station assignments, public relations, and the physical maintenance of the room itself. In modern bistros or casual restaurants, this position is known as either “dining room manager” or “host.”

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**Depending on the establishment, the headwaiter** may have the responsibilities of the manager or host, or he or she may act as the captain of a dining room or of a primary station in the dining room.

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**The captain (classically known as the “chef de rang”)** is usually in charge of service in a particular station of tables, takes the orders from the guests, and assists the front waiter in serving the food. The captain must have a profound knowledge of food and wine and be able to translate that knowledge into language that is understandable to each guest.

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**The host or receptionist** is the person who greets (and occasionally seats) the guests, takes phone reservations, and looks after the needs of the front desk area. In casual restaurants, this position often replaces all of the previously mentioned positions.

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**The sommelier (or wine steward)** is responsible for the creation of the wine list, the purchasing and storage of wines (maintenance of the wine inventory), the recommendation of wines to guests, and the wine service.

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**Second in command of the station, the front waiter** takes the order from the captain, relays it to the kitchen through the point-of-sale system or with a hand dupe, and serves the food with assistance from the captain. The front waiter often assists the captain in taking some orders, or assists the back waiter in bringing the food from the kitchen. The front waiter’s position may not be as glamorous as that of the captain, but the captain relies heavily on the front waiter’s efficiency.

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**The back waiter or food runner (classically known as the “*commis de suite*”)** brings drinks and food to the front waiter, sets up the guéridon (the cart used for tableside cooking and service) as needed, gets all food and beverage for the assigned station, helps clear, and generally assists the front waiter.

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**The bus person or “busser”** is often an apprentice or trainee to become a back waiter or room service waiter and may work his or her way up the ranks. The bus person is responsible for stocking side stands and guéridons, and for cleaning during the preparation time prior to service. The busser is an extremely valuable member of the service team and can be integral to that team’s success. A great busser can lighten the burden on the rest of the service team, enabling them to concentrate more on serving the guests.

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## *Baking and Pastry*

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Bakers, bakers’ assistants, and pastry chefs very often are considered specialists. There was a tendency in the past to divide the kitchen so completely that it was not unusual to have pastry chefs professing total ignorance of what went on in other parts of the kitchen.

Some young chefs turn to baking and pastry after spending some time or getting training in the hot kitchen. They can tell you that they find that the underlying principles are the same. Still, time spent in the hot kitchen is not essential. If you know that the bakeshop is where your talents and interests lie, you should tailor your education and training so that you can get the most benefit out of your time spent in school or as an apprentice.

It is undeniably true that a good chef must be well versed in all areas of the kitchen, including the bakeshop. His or her ability to work with a variety of pastry doughs, mousses, and other mixtures more commonly associated with the bakeshop is a good indicator of the seriousness of his or her commitment to excellence.

However, it is equally true that some people will find that they are more drawn to work in the bakeshop than they are to work in the kitchen. There are a number of differences between life as a pastry chef and life as an executive or head chef. However, there is no difference in the respect to which those who have reached the upper levels of either branch of the culinary arts are entitled.

A quick look through the Yellow Pages, the offerings in your local bookstore, or the word-of-mouth information you may come across will prove not only that bakeshops are still alive, but also that they are gaining in recognition and prestige. Small and not-so-small bakeries are producing some exceptional artisanal breads, using a combination of traditional and modern techniques.

Bakeshops are noted primarily for their production of muffins, quick breads, yeast breads, rolls, and simple desserts. Although this generally is not considered glamorous work, it is work that demands skill, creativity, and the ability to produce large amounts of products quickly and efficiently. Pastry shops generally produce more elaborate baked goods. Some may specialize in wedding cakes, others in items made from puff pastry or croissants. Quick breads, muffins, and other simple batters are relatively easy to prepare, but a bakeshop can make or break its reputation based on their quality.

Bakers must be able to scale (or measure) ingredients accurately, mix them properly, and bake them correctly. This is not just a simple matter of following a formula. On any given day, the air may be more humid, or the flour may be a little harder or drier than the last batch. Only bakers who are skilled enough to see or feel the difference in a dough and make the correct adjustments can ensure consistency. Many large-scale bakeshops use machines to mix and shape doughs, which makes for greater uniformity of product.

Just as there are Certified Executive Chefs and Certified Master Chefs, there are also Certified Master Pastry Chefs. This honor is bestowed on those people who have completed the required and rigorous course of studies and examinations coupled with the appropriate experience.

## The Bakeshop

The chain of command in a bakeshop is actually not very different from that of the kitchen. There is a head baker and assistant baker and then as many additional workers as necessary to meet the daily production quota.

The hours for a baker are rigorous, just as they are for most other people working in the culinary arts. Bakers, however, usually start their work before the sun comes up and finish about the time that chefs who work the dinner shift are coming in to work.



*The bakeshop*

There are bakeshops that do the work from start to finish, and there are those that purchase products that are partially prepared. One bakeshop will have its own “secret” formulas for breads, muffins, and cupcakes. Others will purchase frozen doughs and finish baking them. In either case, the level of expertise required from the workers will determine how well they are paid.

Many hotels and supermarkets, and even some fast-food chains that offer fresh-baked biscuits, will have to do at least some of the baking directly on the premises. While this is often nothing more complicated than adding the required amount of liquid to a prepared mix, others will make more complicated items, such as Danish pastries or doughnuts that require filling, frosting, and glazing.

## **Fine Pastries and Plated Desserts**

Pastry shops are responsible for preparing the more elaborate baked items. These include small French pastries, elaborate cakes, wedding cakes, candies, and other specialty items.

The work that is done in pastry shops is even more exacting than that done in bakeshops. The creations that are produced require a certain sense of form, line, and balance. These are the creations that cause people to stop in their tracks.

Working with chocolate and sugar are among the special skills that pastry chefs must have. These talents take a great deal of time, training, patience, and practice. It is not unusual for a trained chef to decide to move into this demanding and specialized field. Quite often, he or she will elect to continue his or her training, either by attending a school that is dedicated to teaching this craft or by working closely with a respected pastry chef.

## **Commercial Bakeries**

Large bakeries that produce breads, cookies, and other baked goods employ large numbers of bakers. Not all of these bakers need be specially skilled, however. The large batches that are produced are made according to carefully developed formulas. The mixing, kneading, shaping, rising, and baking of bread, for instance, is usually carefully controlled and monitored by sophisticated equipment. Today, it often is computerized to ensure that the quality and consistency of the product is exactly maintained.

However, there is no substitute for humans in some areas, especially when it comes to developing new products. The formulas used for large-quantity production often start as family recipes or new ideas that were unearthed on special trips to Europe or South America. Alternatively, they may be completely new developments.

Then the real work begins. The formula must be continually revised until the product reaches its final stages. At that point, it is ready to go out for test marketing and, finally, full-scale production.

## **In-House Bakeshops and Pastry Shops**

It is often a mark of superior quality if a restaurant can claim, truthfully, that its breads, pastries, and desserts are all prepared from scratch on the premises. Reputations can be made or lost based on the goodness of a piece of cake or other dessert.

It certainly is possible to buy almost anything prepared. Cheesecakes, tortes, pies, and ice creams are all available from purveyors. Today it is even possible to purchase prepared soufflés; all you have to do is bake them in the oven. However, if a restaurant or hotel can afford to offer guests truly fresh muffins, bagels, breads, and other bakery items, the difference is something that even less discriminating customers can appreciate.


## **Specialty Work and Entrepreneurs**

There are stores in most small and large cities that offer specialty items, such as chocolates, éclairs, napoleons, and special cakes, to name just a few. Some shop owners prefer to sell their wares exclusively to restaurants, hotels, and other fine-dining establishments. Others are open to the public.

The production of wedding cakes is one popular area of specialization. This is a very particular type of work, calling for a number of skills and talents. Not all of these talents are strictly related to the actual baking of the cake and mixing of the icing. It also is important to have an artistic sense, the flair to create beautiful things from buttercream, marzipan, chocolate, or royal icing. These ingredients are the special “paints” or “clays” that pastry chefs use to create their works of art.

Many people who do not want to work full-time in a bakeshop prepare cakes, pies, and other items in their homes. They may do this for only one or two restaurants, producing their “signature” items, or they may work with a caterer or catering house to prepare the desserts and pastries for special

events. Remember that any business, whether it operates in a dedicated facility or out of one's home, must meet all the requirements for food safety. This includes making sure that all permits, licenses, and inspections are current. Some areas may have specific regulations that pertain to home-run businesses; some may not permit them at all.

 Managing a restaurant, or any other business, is a job that requires the ability to handle information, people (human resources), and time effectively. The greater your skills are in managing any of these areas, the greater your potential will be for success.

### **Managing Information**

You may often feel that you can never keep current in all the important areas of your work. Given the sheer volume of information generated each day, you are probably right. The ability to tap into the information resources you need using all types of media is at the heart of managing your operation.

Restaurants, menus, and trends in dining room design have all been dramatically affected by such societal trends as busier, on-the-go lifestyles and increasing interest in world cuisines, as well as such online resources as Facebook and Yelp. Prevailing tastes in politics, art, fashion, movies, and music do have an effect on what people eat and where. The fact that individuals and groups can communicate at lightning speed by virtue of social media means that you can feel the impact almost immediately.

### **Managing Human Resources**

Restaurant operations rely directly on the work and dedication of a number of people, from executives and administrators to line cooks, waitstaff, and maintenance and cleaning staff. No matter how large or small your staff may be, the ability to engage all your workers in a team effort is one of the major factors in determining whether or not you will succeed.

### **Managing Time**

It may seem that no matter how hard you work or how much planning you do, the days are not long enough. Learning new skills so that you can make the best possible use of the time you have certainly ought to be an ongoing part of your career development. If you look over your operation, you will see where time is wasted.

In most operations, the top five time wasters are not having clear priorities for tasks, poor staff training, poor communication, poor organization, and missing or inadequate tools to accomplish tasks.



*Food and beverage management*

## *Food and Beverage Manager*

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This is an important position found in restaurants, both single and multi-unit, as well as hotels, convention centers, and resorts. It can be the goal of both front-of-the-house and back-of-the-house personnel. In order to rise to the rank of manager and succeed at it, individuals must make careful decisions regarding the type of education they will receive and where they will receive it. Managing an operation is a job that requires many talents, including interpersonal skills to handle the tasks of hiring and training staff and dealing

with customers, clients, and suppliers. It also requires business skills such as accounting, forecasting, costing, and short- and long-term planning and strategizing. In the past, a great gulf was perceived to exist between chefs and food and beverage managers. However, these days, as more and more people move from the kitchen into management, the overall operation of a hotel or restaurant almost invariably benefits when the manager understands the operation of the kitchen, since it is generally the heart of any food-service establishment.

Graduates with management degrees very often spend some time looking at how the restaurant operation affects overall hospitality operation, but they may not have an innate sense for what is actually possible in a particular kitchen or in a certain type of dining room. As a result, there can be some loss

of efficiency. The chef turned manager can offer many skills that someone trained solely in business management cannot; however, there is still a need for experience and mastery of management techniques. That is why many companies and corporations have established “manager-in-training” (MIT) programs to develop those skills and techniques.

As you continue your career, you will move from positions where your technical prowess is your greatest contribution into those where your skills as an executive, an administrator, and a manager are more clearly in demand. This does not mean that your ability to grill, sauté, or roast foods to the exact point of doneness is less important than it was before. It does mean that you will be called on to learn and assume tasks and responsibilities that are more managerial, marking a shift in the evolution of your career.

In an executive position, you must shoulder a large portion of responsibility for the success or failure of your establishment. Executives do not operate in a vacuum, however. Nor do they emerge full-blown one day out of the blue. Even before you wear a jacket embroidered with “Executive Chef,” you will have begun to exercise your abilities as an executive.

Learn to use the important tools of your business; 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 administer a number of areas efficiently: inventory, purchases, losses, sales, profits, food costs, customer complaints, reservations, payroll, schedules, and budgets. If you are not capable of using the appropriate technology to track all this information and more, you cannot be as effective as you need to be.

## *Research and Development*

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Many people have exciting jobs working for groups that at first glance might not look like they would employ chefs. These groups include special-interest organizations, research groups, manufacturers, and others.

Everyone who produces a piece of equipment that is used in a kitchen, or a bottled sauce, spice, herb, or mustard, would like to be able to help their potential customer get the most out of their product. This is important in order to build consumer confidence, increase repeat business, and help get



*Research and development*

them or keep them at the top of the heap. Who better than a chef or someone trained in the culinary arts to help devise recipes, uses, videotapes, booklets, pamphlets, and cookbooks that promote the product?

Other areas that we will look at in this chapter include test kitchens operated by magazines and paid recipe testers who assist in testing the recipes published in cookbooks.

## **Product Development**

When you buy a box of cornmeal and see that there are recipes on the back of the box, do you ever wonder where those recipes come from? When you get a small pamphlet of recipes from a cocoa producer, do you know where those recipes were developed?

There are many organizations, such as the National Avocado Advisory or the Potato Council, that have newsletters or Web sites for the purpose of encouraging chefs or consumers to use certain products. Recipes form a cornerstone of these sites' publications. They act as a blueprint to get the consumer to try the product, whether it is a new and unfamiliar product or an old standard that needs a face-lift.

## **Equipment Design and Development**

Practically every cooking appliance, whether it is large or small, arrives in its box along with a recipe booklet that includes detailed instructions for operating the equipment and producing a variety of dishes using the equipment. The recipes that are included were developed and carefully tested to make sure that the consumer would be able to understand them and make them work.

This type of work can take a good deal of time and effort, but it can be exciting. You will have an opportunity to work with tools that may not yet be available to the public, and the work that is done in research kitchens can have a great impact on the success of the tool's introduction. One need only look at the enormous acceptance that the microwave oven has had to realize that this field is wide open for dedicated workers.

## Test Kitchens

Magazines that devote themselves to writing about food often incorporate recipes as well. The person writing about this food needs to have the ability to not only write and do research; he or she also must be able to develop recipes that will showcase the special flavor, texture, color, or nutritional characteristic of a food to its best advantage. This means that the person doing the writing must be able to organize a body of research and put it into a context that the home or professional cook can use.

As there is increasing interest in special foods, such as farm-raised game animals or wild mushrooms, there is increasing demand to know how to choose the best-quality item from among the oftentimes bewildering range of selections. Technological advances also are responsible for increasing the number of options available to the chef and the home cook.

The work done in the test kitchens of magazines can be some of the most fascinating a food writer can find. It combines the best of both worlds: working with food and then writing about it. In many cases, this work also may offer an opportunity to break into the world of food styling and even food photography.

## Menu Development

Without some adventurous work in the kitchen and a willingness to try new approaches to food, a restaurant can become “caught in time,” and its popularity may wane. Ongoing menu development is essential to keeping a restaurant relevant.

For example, continued work on the part of nutritionists is opening the doors to an onrush of interest in cooking that is based on grains, legumes, fresh vegetables, and fish rather than on the traditional “American” high-protein, high-fat diet. Nutritionists are the catalysts for this new information. But unless and until a chef is available to translate these practical concerns into a meal that satisfies on several levels—taste, satiety, texture, and general appeal—it is not possible for the average chef to make use of these new pieces of information. Instead, he or she will be inclined to stick to the tried-and-true recipes that are sure to please customers.

Other important issues and concerns also play into menu development and have an impact on how successful a restaurant’s menu will be, ranging from sustainability to authenticity. Locally and regionally sourced foods are

on the minds of many restaurant patrons. The chef must be informed about the issues and also about the potential impact of these concerns on the foods that are purchased and prepared in the restaurant. Research is a factor, as well as the ability to create networks and establish business relationships. Implementing new or revised menu items may also call for additional staff training, even hiring new staff in some cases. There may be a need to develop new standard operating procedures or adjust prices to reflect the new foods or production methods required by the menu. Menu development often has a ripple effect that runs throughout the restaurant, from the advertising and promotion to menu pricing to the style of service that may be required. It may have an effect on kitchen equipment or tabletop and service items.

## **Corporate Research and Development**

Companies that produce food products (General Foods, Pillsbury, and Heinz, for instance) are constantly looking for new items that will capture the interest of the buying public. Before a new cereal, frozen food, cake mix, or salad dressing is introduced, it will undergo exhaustive evaluation and research, not only to determine its potential to make money but also to find out how it acts when it is heated, refrigerated, stored on a shelf, or frozen. In some cases, it may be important to determine how to promote the product to the consumer, whether the consumer is a restaurant or an individual.

## *Food Communications and Media*

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There are several careers that involve working directly with food but not actually preparing foods to be eaten by a paying public. Photographers, stylists, and writers are all important to the foodservice industry in a number of ways. They form a central clearinghouse for new ideas, they help establish and demolish trends, and they set the standards by which the public judges what happens in restaurants. There are also fascinating positions in sales and service, public relations, advertising, and media.

## Food Photography

Food photography is everywhere you look, from the striking images in food publications such as magazines and books to advertising. Food writers who produce blogs, Web sites, or e-books are becoming increasingly adept at producing good-quality photographs.

While we think of food photography as primarily still images, the emergence of videography for the Web as well as its importance to television programs and films has made this an important medium as well. Some photographers work primarily on editorial jobs such as cookbooks, while others work in a commercial environment to produce the advertisements featured in national media.

When the food is sitting right in front of you, your senses of smell and taste will have an influence on how appealing (or unappealing) it is. You can experience the different textures, the temperature, the thickness, the spiciness — all of the elements that are so important. However, with photography, you can only appeal to the sense of sight. Some foods are not visually appealing. Nevertheless, the challenge is somehow to make them look that way, whether for an ad campaign, a feature story in a magazine, or the jacket of a new cookbook. Trends in photography and video are constantly changing, as is the technology that supports this type of work.

It is important to understand the basic principles of photography and lighting, how to operate a camera, and how to arrange foods so that they look appealing. The ability to work in a digital environment, including being skilled at various types of software and applications, is critical. (For more information and resources related to food photography, see page 247.)

## Food Styling

The preparation of the food being photographed and the way it is placed or arranged is often the work of a second person, known as a “food stylist.” When you look at a magazine article and are struck by the way the food is spread out on a plate or the way it is garnished or the presence or lack of other items in the photograph, you are usually reacting to the work of the food stylist. They, too, like food photographers, undergo primarily on-the-job training.



*Food photography and food styling*

While you can pursue a degree in photography or film, you may find that an education in hands-on food styling is only available by means of internships or apprenticeships with established stylists.

It is up to the stylist to make sure that the lettuce leaves are perfect, with not a single detectable fault, and that the sauce is carefully ladled onto the plate after the chicken is arranged to achieve the greatest visual impact.

Without some knowledge of food — how to select the best product and apply the right technique, how to cut the vegetables and slice the turkey — the stylist would be at a loss. (For more information and resources related to food styling, see page 261.)

## Food Writing and Communications

All you have to do is walk into any bookstore or do a simple search on the Internet to see that there is a large and seemingly inexhaustible market for all things culinary. Food publications range from single-subject books and blogs on anything from beans to chocolate to those that center on a particular type of cuisine or ethnic style. Some are encyclopedic in their scope.

The people who write the blogs or books, edit recipes, or acquire projects for publishing houses have to have a good basic knowledge of food and cooking in order to be successful and make a living.

Restaurant critics are as important to restaurants as are the people who will dine in them. It is certainly true that critics are notorious for their highly personalized opinions, but it is interesting to note just how influential some critics can be, even in the era of such community-based sites as Yelp.

Food historians and ethnographers help us to understand the current state of the culinary arts by digging deeper into the traditions and history of our culinary behaviors.

Today, writers with a particular slant on the food industry, whether they be concerned with sustainability or authenticity, nutrition or food security, are finding a growing audience for their work, especially if they have a solid grounding in what constitutes both good food and good cooking.

There are a number of trade and consumer publications (both traditional print publications and online resources) that focus on food, and many newspapers devote a portion of their papers (usually on Wednesdays) to food and entertainment. The person who writes these articles is usually well-read in the culinary arts and proficient in the kitchen as well. The kinds of articles that might be called for could range from a simple discussion of how to brew a pot of tea to an informational piece on nutritional cooking or special new foods.

Reviews of cookbooks, small pieces on new foods or equipment, human interest stories, press releases — all of these are examples of the kinds of pieces that you may be able to pitch to magazines to start your portfolio. Read the publications, both trade and consumer, to see what their audience is like. There are special publications that will explain how to submit articles to magazines for consideration. (For more information and resources related to food writing and communication, see page 247.)

## Public Relations and Advertising

The number of companies that produce or sell food items or equipment for preparing foods, national councils that promote a particular food, and other special-interest groups that are directly or indirectly related to the culinary arts is staggering. Who would have imagined a National Onion Association? Nevertheless, there is such an organization, and countless others devoted to products ranging from raisins to avocados to potatoes. Some have been around for a long time, like the National Dairy Council, while others, like the Popcorn Board, are relatively new.

What they all have in common is that they need people to help them get their message out to the public. This may mean that they need writers, photographers and stylists, and recipe developers who can all showcase their product or equipment.

There also are numerous advertising agencies, some of which handle food and food-related clients exclusively. The campaigns that these companies devise for their clients are often incredibly innovative and exciting. Someone who knows about food can play a significant role in getting them off the ground, from helping to develop the original concept to getting the food onto the plate and into the photo.

It may be helpful to take additional courses in marketing and advertising in order to qualify for the jobs that really appeal to you, but experience on the job is something that is worth its weight in gold.

## *Sales*

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As cooking styles around the world open up to embrace global influences, chefs are looking for a whole bevy of new products such as ingredients, tools, and serving pieces to keep their menus lively and their bottom lines healthy. Skilled salespeople are needed to pitch these products to the end consumers, and someone trained with a background in the foodservice industry has a distinct advantage. Whether you work for a large purveyor or you are a sales force of one for your artisanal cheeses, you have a base of knowledge that can give you an edge. For instance, you would never show up at 12:30 P.M. on a Tuesday if the restaurant is most famous for its lunches. Sales jobs demand

great communication skills, especially verbal communication in a one-on-one setting. Organization, attention to detail, punctuality, and honesty are also found on the résumé of the skilled and successful salesperson. Many sales jobs are based upon a commission rather than a straight salary, so your abilities as a salesperson will have a direct relationship to your earning potential.

## *Summary*

*In this chapter, we have briefly examined a variety of career possibilities, all related to food. A passion to work with food no longer limits your career options to working long hours in a hot kitchen. Passion alone, however, will not qualify you for your dream job. Creating your culinary career involves active career management: learning and perfecting the skills needed to do the job you seek, creating lasting and active connections with those who can assist you along the way, and crafting marketing strategies that will encourage potential employers to want to hire you. The chapters that follow provide you with tools that you can use to actively define, design, and pursue your culinary career.*

*Your career is a living, changing entity that requires constant monitoring, upkeep, and adjustments. This book is a resource to assist you at all stages of your career, from building a foundation through achieving a pinnacle position, along with all the stops and starts, twists, and turns that may happen in between. We encourage you to write in this book. Let it be an active part of your career: your log, your journal, your tool of reflection as you create your culinary career.*