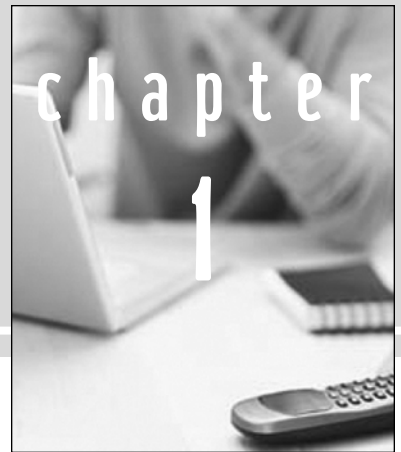


THE EVOLUTION OF THE PERSONAL CHEF



Cooking is at once one of the simplest and most gratifying of the arts, but to cook well one must love and respect food.

—Chef Craig Claiborne (1920-2000), author and *New York Times* food critic

Culinary history has not officially recorded when the first personal chef opened his doors for business. Was it hundreds of years ago, when a talented chef cooked for several affluent families, traveling from one estate to another? Or was the first personal chef someone who cooked for a friend's family that had fallen on hard times and needed help with the day-to-day chores of the household? History provides us with clues, but determining when the personal chef profession emerged is open to discussion.

The Business of Being a Personal Chef

This text is about the business of being a personal chef. A personal chef is a chef for hire who provides a range of services and products to customers. Some personal chefs cook in four or five homes per week, leaving behind multiple customized meals that meet the taste and nutritional profiles of their clients. Others specialize in preparing menu items for dinner parties, catering events, or even teaching culinary classes. No matter which avenue they choose, personal chefs constantly strive to customize the food they prepare to meet the needs of their clients. The business of being a personal chef is based on providing the utmost in quality of service and cuisine.

Personal chefs operate with all the advantages and responsibilities that small business owners have. They plan, market, promote, pay bills, produce food, and do what they can to develop their business. Personal chefs come from all backgrounds. Some begin their career in this business with limited formal culinary training, while others have years of industry cooking experience. Still others are second-career culinary school graduates and cooks. Many professional personal chefs are certified by the American Culinary Federation.

As we interviewed successful personal chefs around the country so we could include their stories from the field, it became abundantly clear that they all share three common traits:

Exhibit 1.1 Certification Levels for the Personal Chef as Recognized by the American Culinary Federation

Personal Certified Chef

For a chef with a minimum of two full years employed as a personal chef who is engaged in the preparation, cooking, serving, and sorting of foods on a cook-for-hire basis; responsible for menu planning and development, marketing, financial management, and operational decisions of private business; provides cooking services to a variety of clients; possesses a thorough knowledge of food safety and sanitation and culinary nutrition.

<http://www.acfchefs.org/certify/pcc.html>

Personal Certified Executive Chef

For a chef with advanced culinary skills and a minimum of seven years of professional cooking experience with a minimum of two years as a personal chef; provides cooking services on a cook-for-hire basis to a variety of clients; responsible for menu planning and development, marketing, financial management, and operational decisions; provides nutritious, safe, eye-appealing, and properly flavored foods.

<http://www.acfchefs.org/certify/pcec.html>

- *The love of cooking and serving great food.* Personal chefs understand what good food can mean to their clients on a personal level—it's more than just taste.
- *The desire to service their clients' needs, even if a client isn't entirely sure what his needs are.* Personal chefs help their clients determine what their needs are as they develop partnerships with those clients. This might be called the *hospitality spirit of service*.
- *The enjoyment and satisfaction that come from being one's own boss.* However, as you will learn for yourself as you go into the business world, self-employment is not for everyone!

While there are many similarities between personal chefs and private chefs, it's important that we distinguish between these two culinary professions. A private chef is one who is employed by a specific person or organization exclusively. She earns a paycheck and is responsible for providing her culinary services to one person or group. She works scheduled hours, cooks menus to satisfy the needs of her employer, whether a family or an organization. As pointed out previously, a personal chef is a chef for hire who works for herself as a small business operator. There is no exclusivity agreement involved, and she can choose the number of clients with whom she will associate and for whom she will prepare customized menus.

As the profession began to gain popularity among culinarians and the attention of the media, many critics called personal chefs a fad profession that would be around only as long as it was fashionable. However, over time, this supposed fad became a trend and gave chefs and cooks around the world the opportunity to work with food on their own terms. The personal chef trend has become a legitimate career path in the culinary industry and a viable alternative career for culinarians looking to leave traditional cooking situations.

In the May 2004 issue of *Entrepreneur* magazine, Paul and Sarah Edwards named the personal chef business as one of the top four hottest home-based businesses

to start in the United States. Along with growth has come recognition and validation by industry professionals and governmental entities. In 2003, the American Culinary Federation in partnership with the American Personal & Private Chef Association adopted specific certification requirements for Personal Certified Chef (PCC) and Personal Certified Executive Chef (PCEC). This marked a turning point in the recognition of personal chefs by their culinary peers around the world.



Using This Text

This text is about the business of being a personal chef. As a culinarian, whether you are enrolled at a culinary school, a serious cooking hobbyist, or an industry professional looking for a career change, your skill and expertise will become the foundations of your personal chef business. This book is not intended to be a resource for recipes and cooking methods, except when they are used as examples. Rather, the goal is to provide you with a roadmap of the tasks that must be completed as you launch and develop your personal chef business. Each chapter in this text includes the following features:

- Learning outcomes
- Bolded key terms with definitions
- Review questions
 - True/False
 - Multiple choice
 - Discussion/Activities
- “From the Field” interviews and stories from working professional personal chefs that highlight how working personal chefs have approached specific aspects of their businesses. These interviews include discussion questions to help drive thoughtful group discussion in the classroom.



Organization of the Text

Chapters 2 through 6 focus primarily on what must be done to ensure your personal chef business is well organized and that you’ve investigated everything required to legally run your own business. Chapters 7 through 10 discuss the market research, marketing tools, and strategy needed to seed your target market so potential clients are aware that your personal chef business exists and clear about the quality of service and level of customization you offer. Finally, the last two chapters cover a day in the life of a professional personal chef and opportunities that have the potential to help you grow your business once you have launched it successfully and have a set of loyal clients.

EACH CHAPTER IN A NUTSHELL

- Chapter 1 provides a brief history of the business of being a personal chef and discusses the future of this career path for culinarians.

- Chapter 2 covers the forms of business ownership and the tax liabilities associated with each.
- Chapter 3 is about operating your personal chef service legally.
- Chapter 4 discusses the importance of developing a sound business plan and defines its components.
- Chapter 5 covers the vision statement and mission statement and their importance as the foundation of everything your business does. It also highlights the elevator speech and how it helps you and your business make a good first impression on potential clients.
- Chapter 6 deals with financial planning for your personal chef business.
- Chapter 7 is about the forms of business marketing a personal chef might use.
- Chapter 8 provides a detailed account of the services the professional personal chef can offer clients and the sales methods he can use to promote them.
- Chapter 9 focuses on the optimal forms of advertising available to professional personal chefs.
- Chapter 10 covers customer service and its critical importance to the success of a personal chef business.
- Chapter 11 describes a day in the life of a personal chef.
- Chapter 12 presents opportunities that have the potential to expand a personal chef's business.

This text provides you with the information you need to start a business that will allow you to cook on your own terms while supporting your passion for serving wonderful, delicious foods in an effort to make a positive change in people's lives.



From the Field

Chef Candy Wallace, *The Serving Spoon*

ONE CHEF'S EVOLUTION

As personal chefs, we are paid to shop, cook, and nurture.

**—Candy Wallace, Founder and Executive Director,
American Personal & Private Chef Institute and Association**

"My grandmother was a chef. She taught me the way you show your family and the world you love them is through food," says Candy Wallace, founder of the American Personal & Private Chef Institute and Association (APPCA). Candy started cooking in a family-owned restaurant as a teenager but promised her grandmother she would go to college "because cooking is a hard way for a woman to make a living," as her grandmother said. Good to her promise, Candy graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in political science.

She lived in Washington, D.C., and worked for a congressman during the day. On the weekends, she returned to her roots by planning and cooking dinner parties for government officials. "Washington is the dinner party capital of world," she says. "Dinner is the way people entertain and network, which provides for an exciting mix of international cuisines." A few years

later she moved to Chicago and opened a lobbying office for a food manufacturer. Again, Candy found herself doing dinner parties on the weekends for clients, many of whom worked at the radio station where her husband was general sales manager.

Eventually, Candy moved to the West Coast and began an entirely new career working as a national media buyer for a photo chain—but she continued to plan and cook for weekend dinner parties. In addition, she decided to cook part time at a local restaurant to satisfy her passion for cooking for others.

One evening at her corporate job, she had an epiphany and decided to leave corporate America to follow her passion for food and service. Knowing she wanted to continue to cook professionally, but on her own terms, she resigned and entered the new world—the world of a personal chef.

“I wanted to find a way to blend my culinary skills with my business skills in an effort to serve multiple clients as an independent business owner, one client at a time. I was going to make it personal and cook the freshly prepared foods the clients wanted to enjoy, but I would cook for them in *their* homes.” Recalling her grandmother’s advice to “keep it simple and be true to the harvest,” she opened a personal chef business called Candy Wallace, Personal Chef, later The Serving Spoon.

This business was a success, due mainly to Candy maintaining her goal of “taking care of my clients the way I take care of my friends and family. I took the time to learn what they liked to eat and how they liked to eat. I also found out whether or not they had allergies, sensitivities, or whether or not there were certain tastes and textures they simply did not enjoy.” Knowing that cooking is more than food, she specialized in customizing her clients’ foods by “getting to really know them.” One of her first clients needed to lose weight, so Candy researched healthy recipes containing foods that not only fit the profile for weight loss, but that he would also enjoy. He lost over 75 pounds!

Candy’s business is as much about service as it is about food. “No one cared what anyone wanted anymore,” she states. “Service was becoming a thing of the past, so I made certain that providing scrupulous personal service was as much a part of my business as the delicious meals I prepared for my clients. Clients would literally fall into my arms, they were so pleased. When Mom and Dad are both working, the family is forced to catch meals on the fly. What I wanted to do was to bring families back to the table to enjoy one another along with the freshly prepared foods they wanted, and I knew what they wanted because I asked them.” She felt “they had every right to ask for what they wanted because they were paying me, and it was my job to provide it.”

As she continued to develop her new career, Candy learned how much the service she provided could affect a family or an individual. The concept of bringing the family back to the dinner table, where they could enjoy healthy and delicious meals cooked in their own home, was powerful. “People get tired of eating out all the time. Sometimes they want to have good food in their jammies while curled up on the sofa, and the personal chef business provides a service that allows clients to do just that.” The service she designed would supply Monday through Friday meal support for busy, hungry professionals who appreciate palate-specific meals prepared from fresh ingredients.

A Change of Direction

Candy received a fair amount of press coverage as a personal chef, which drew the attention of the business editor of the *San Diego Tribune*. He arranged to tag along with her and wrote a feature article about her and the business of being a personal chef. Within a week of the article’s publication, she received over 300 phone calls from people either wanting service or looking for more information about becoming a professional personal chef. “Almost half the calls were from professionals who wanted to change their careers,” she recalls. “I had no idea so many people were unhappy in their jobs and would rather be cooking. Some wanted to become my assistant to learn about the industry, while others wanted to tag along,” she says. This abundance of interest led her to start a personal chef organization in San Diego, which she founded to provide education and networking resources for people who wanted to become professional personal chefs. At the time, her husband, Dennis, told her to stop talking about the profession and all the resources available and “write it down.” She took his advice and wrote her first training manual intended for the professional personal chef.

Candy held classes for prospective chefs once a month at the San Diego personal chef chapter, and students did “tag-alongs” as part of their education. Membership grew exponentially and Candy became an invaluable advocate for personal

From the Field...continued

chefs, matching chefs with clients as the calls came in. This group of personal chefs became close and supportive of one another, something Candy discovered when Dennis had a heart attack. The group contacted all of Candy's clients to arrange for continuation of their service while Candy took time off to help with her husband's recovery. It was during this time she realized she wanted to take her program national to promote the personal chef career path. The result is the American Personal & Private Chef Institute and Association (APPCA).

During the past twelve years, Candy has trained more than 5,000 chefs who have entered the culinary field as professional personal chefs. She has worked hard to validate this nontraditional culinary career path and, in the summer of 2002, signed a charter representing official national recognition of this career path by the American Culinary Federation (ACF). "I always wanted a third-party accredited certification. Although the APCA could certify personal chefs, it would mean more coming from an outside professional organization such as the ACF," she says. The ACF offers two levels of personal chef certification: the Personal Certified Chef and a Personal Certified Executive Chef. More information on these certifications is on the ACF website at www.acfchefs.org.

During the last few years, the personal chef business has enjoyed enormous growth. Print and electronic media have covered stories about personal chefs around the country. Throughout the United States, culinary schools have invited Candy to present a program on career options in the culinary industry and how to do business as a personal chef, and the international culinary community is taking an interest in her work as well. APPCA presents regional seminars and workshops to chefs who wish to enter the personal chef industry.

Candy's contribution to the growth of the personal chef industry was recognized with the prestigious Award of Excellence as International Entrepreneur of the Year in 2003 by the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP). She is currently on the board of directors for the San Diego chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier and is a mentor and national speaker for the IACP, Women Chefs and Restaurateurs, and the ACF.

People may argue about when the first personal chefs began working but culinarians' desire to cook on their own terms initiated a legitimate alternative career path that is constantly evolving.

Many of the personal chefs interviewed for this book report they no longer have to explain what a personal chef is and how they differ from caterers and private chefs to local health departments and other governmental licensing agencies. Whether recognition leads to greater demand or vice versa makes no difference. This culinary career path serves the needs of many chefs and gives them great satisfaction as they provide customized service and foods to their clients. The personal chef business is growing at an astounding rate, becoming more mainstream, and will continue to grow into the foreseeable future.

In an interview we had with Irena Chalmers, internationally known author and food lecturer, she talks about the growth and attraction of the personal chef industry to culinary students. Her insights on the personal chef profession are very interesting.

Irena Chalmers, award-winning cookbook author and food writer, instructor at the Culinary Institute of America, states that students are drawn toward the idea of becoming a personal chef because they like the idea of freedom and independence associated with being your own boss. "The personal chef industry is an extremely good option for a man or woman because they have flexibility with their time" she states. "People are excited about being their own boss, this gives them the ability to use their knowledge and passion and be flexible with their time."

When asked about the perceived value of using a personal chef she stated, "Think about the money you spend each week at the supermarket and how much of the food is thrown away or wasted. Economically it might make sense to have prepared food waiting for you in the refrigerator when you get home from work which can be very lovely and wonderful." Over the past years, industry has made it easier to cook, but so many people don't want to cook, it does not matter how easy it is, it is something that is not captivating, especially if someone else will do it for you. Some people think of cooking for themselves as a waste of time."