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ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE KITCHEN
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What does it take to be a good food service worker? The emphasis of a food service education is on learning a set of skills. But in many ways, *attitudes* are more important than skills because a good attitude will help you not only learn skills but also persevere and overcome the many difficulties you will face. The successful food service worker follows an unwritten code of behaviour and set of attitudes we call **professionalism**. Let's look at some of the qualities a professional must have.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE JOB

In order to be a good professional cook, you have to like cooking and want to do it well. Being serious about your work doesn't mean you can't enjoy it. But the enjoyment comes from the satisfaction of doing your job well and making everything run smoothly. Every experienced chef knows the stimulation of the rush. When it's the busiest time of the evening, the orders are coming in so fast you can hardly keep track of them and every split second counts—then, when everyone digs in and works together and everything clicks, there's real excitement in the air. But this excitement comes only when you work for it. A cook with a positive attitude works quickly, efficiently, neatly, and safely. Professionals have pride in their work and want to make sure it is something to be proud of. Pride in your work and in your profession is important, but humility is important too, especially when you are starting out. Sometimes new culinary school graduates arrive on the job thinking they know everything. Remember that learning to cook and learning to manage a kitchen is a lifelong process and that you are not yet qualified to be executive chef. The importance of a professional attitude begins even before you start your first job. The standard advice for a successful job interview applies to cooks as well as to office professionals: Dress and behave not for the group you belong to but for the group you want to join. Arrive neat, clean, appropriately dressed, and on time. Get noticed for the right reasons. Carry this attitude through every day on the job.

STAYING POWER

Food service requires physical and mental stamina, good health, and a willingness to work hard. It is hard work. The pressure can be intense and the hours long and gruelling. You may be working evenings and weekends when everyone else is playing. And the work can be monotonous. You might think it's drudgery to hand-shape two or three dozen dinner rolls for your baking class, but wait until you get that great job in the big hotel and are told to make 3,000 canapés for a party. Overcoming these difficulties requires a sense of responsibility and a dedication to your profession, to your co-workers, and to your customers or clients. Dedication also means staying with a job and not hopping from kitchen to kitchen every few months. Sticking with a job at least a year or two shows prospective employers you are serious about your work and can be relied on.

ABILITY TO WORK WITH PEOPLE

Few of you will work in an establishment so small that you are the only person on the staff. Food service work is teamwork, and it's essential to be able to work well on a team and to cooperate with your fellow workers. You can't afford to let ego problems, petty jealousy, departmental rivalries, or feelings about other people get in the way of doing the job well. In the old days, many chefs were famous for their temper tantrums. Fortunately, self-control is more valued today.

EAGERNESS TO LEARN

There is more to learn about cooking than you will learn in a lifetime. The greatest chefs in the world are the first to admit they have more to learn, and they keep working, experimenting, and studying. The food service industry is changing so rapidly that it is vital to be open to new ideas. No matter how good your techniques are, you might learn an even better way. Continue to study and read. Seek extra work that gives you the opportunity to learn from people with more experience. For example, if you are working on the hot line in a restaurant, ask the pastry chef if you could come in early, on your own time, to help out and, in the process, gain new knowledge and experience. Many culinary schools and programs have continuing education programs that can help you add new skills. Professional associations such as the American Culinary Federation (ACF) and the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) provide opportunities for learning as well as for making contacts with other professionals.

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A FULL RANGE OF SKILLS

Most people who become professional cooks do so because they like to cook. This is an important motivation, but it is also important to develop and maintain other skills that are

necessary for the profession. To be successful, a cook must understand and manage food cost and other financial matters, manage and maintain proper inventories, deal with purveyors, and understand personnel management.

EXPERIENCE

One of our most respected chefs said, “You don’t really know how to cook a dish until you have done it a thousand times.” There is no substitute for years of experience. Studying cooking principles in books and in schools can get your career off to a running start. You may learn more about basic cooking theories from your chef instructors than you could in several years of working your way up from washing vegetables. But if you want to become an accomplished cook, you need practice, practice, and more practice. A diploma does not make you a chef.

DEDICATION TO QUALITY

Many people think only a special category of food can be called *gourmet food*. It’s hard to say exactly what that is. Apparently, the only thing so-called gourmet foods have in common is high price. The only distinction worth making is between well-prepared food and poorly prepared food. There is good roast duckling à l’orange and there is bad roast duckling à l’orange. There are good hamburgers and French fries, and there are bad hamburgers and French fries. Whether you work in a top restaurant, a fast-food restaurant, a college cafeteria, or a catering house, you can do your job well, or not. The choice is yours. High quality doesn’t necessarily mean high price. It costs no more to cook green beans properly than to overcook them. But in order to produce high-quality food, you must want to. It is not enough to simply know how.

GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE BASICS

Experimentation and innovation in cooking are the order of the day. Brilliant chefs are breaking old boundaries and inventing dishes that would have been unthinkable years ago. There seems to be no limit to what can be tried. However, the chefs who seem to be most revolutionary are the first to insist on the importance of solid grounding in basic techniques and in the classic methods practiced since Escoffier’s day. In order to innovate, you have to know where to begin. For the beginner, knowing the basics will help you take better advantage of your experience. When you watch a practiced cook at work, you will understand better what you are seeing and will know what questions to ask. In order to play great music on the piano, you first have to learn to play scales and exercises. That’s what this book is about. It’s not a course in French cooking or American cooking or gourmet cooking or coffee shop cooking. It’s a course in the basics. When you finish this note, you will not know everything. But you should be ready to take good

advantage of the many rewarding years of food service experience ahead of you.



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