

Culinary Arts/Food Service Management

Is the Culinary Arts/Food Service Management Major the Right Fit For Me?

If you love cooking at home for family and friends, you might believe that preparing food for a living is a good career choice. And you could be right. However, working in the food industry is **not** the same as cooking at home. Do you possess the following key characteristics that will enable you to become successful in the food service industry?

1. Passion for the Art/Drive and Ambition

Culinary professionals almost always have an intense drive and passion for the art of cooking food. They love what they do and realize it takes years of dedication to rise to the upper echelons of your field.

2. Willingness to Learn and Practice

All chefs need to have a proper foundation before they can progress in their careers. Study of classical techniques and immersion in various types of cuisine are key to becoming a well-rounded culinarian. Without these basic skills, you will not have the tools you need to grow as a professional, devise innovative dishes, and inspire staff and customers to follow your vision. It takes years to learn and sharpen your skills. Great culinarians never quit practicing their craft and strive to get better with each task.

3. Positive, Can-Do Attitude/Commitment to Quality in Everything

It can seem like an arduous journey to become revered in this industry. Most of the top chefs have failed at least once in their lifetime or had significant setbacks, but they did not let those obstacles stop them. You must have confidence in your skills and the drive to keep going even when it seems impossible. The commitment to excellence is what sets great chefs apart from their peers.

4. Attitude of a Team Player/Humility and Deference

Everyone has an important and special role in building a successful food service operation. The best leaders are able to identify the talents of their employees and nurture them to improve the organization as a whole. Good chefs work well with others and leave their egos at the door. Be a good listener. Respect others. You will need to be able to take direction from your supervisors and respond in a cooperative and respectful manner. The two words "Yes, Chef" will take you far.

5. Endurance/Dexterity/Focus=Speed = "Sense of Urgency"

You will be working long hours on your feet. Weekends, nights, and holidays. When everyone else is relaxing over the summer, you are at your busiest. It's not glamorous. It's hot and loud. Dexterity/focus come from practice and preparation.

6. Detail-oriented

It's all about the details that combine to create the experience. Being able to see the finished product and also recognizing which pieces are missing to make it perfect is crucial to becoming a successful chef.

7. Use Criticism Constructively

Every great chef still has something to learn. Not everyone will like everything you prepare. You can't please everyone. Take criticism as an opportunity to learn and improve. Use critiques as a way to construct an even better version of yourself and your art. It's not about you anyway....it's about your customer.

8. Communicate Efficiently and Effectively

Being personable and able to build harmonious working relationships with numerous people in various positions-from executives, supervisors, vendors, co-workers, and customers is of paramount importance in the food service industry. By far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, speak and write effectively.

9. Demonstrate the Ability to Manage Time Effectively, Establish Priorities and Handle Multiple Tasks

Successful food service operations expect employees to manage multiple projects and priorities under strict deadlines while maintaining customer satisfaction. You need to be able to estimate the time and effort required to complete a task and be able to manage your time to meet those commitments. The ability to multi-task is key and having strong organizational skills will enable you to complete the projects at hand efficiently. Labor is one of the highest costs to a food service operation. No one is able to sustain an employee who takes 4 hours to make a soup.

10. Strong Business Sense

As important as proper technical training and creative flair are for a chef, they don't amount to much without knowledge of how to spend wisely and plan strategically to grow a business. Learning how to manage purchasing, inventory control, labor, cost analysis, and marketing are just a few of the elements necessary for creating a successful food service operation; and could be the most important factor in progressing from a chef to an entrepreneur.

Self-Exploration Activity

1. I like working in a fast paced environment.
2. I am able to manage deadlines and work under pressure.
3. I enjoy being active, on my feet, and busy.
4. I like organizing, prioritizing, and being prepared.
5. I don't mind cleaning.
6. I do not get offended easily when given constructive criticism.

7. I like to be challenged. When I am offered a suggestion on how to improve work, I try it out.
8. I realize I must devote time outside of class to develop my craft and will continue to learn new things everyday.
9. I strive to do my best each time even if it is a task I have done before. I see that I get better with practice.
10. When I take in lots of information, I am able to sort it out.
11. I can focus even when there is a lot of activity and noise around me.
12. I enjoy collaborating and working in a group/team setting.
13. I want to work with a diverse group of people.
14. I am detail oriented and can handle multiple tasks effectively.
15. I have strong time management skills and plan quite well with "to do" lists.
16. Quality in production and service is important to me.