

The 2005 Annual HFM Conference (“Recipe for Success”) will feature a culinary competition and will promote culinary excellence. In keeping with this theme, and in response to the numerous inquiries HFM has received regarding the use of “chefs” in healthcare facilities, we are presenting a five-part series of articles to help our readers decide if they should hire a chef, as well as how to select and properly utilize these valuable professionals.

### **Part III**

## **Unlocking the Mystique of the Chef**

### **Advertising and Recruiting**

In Part I (Winter Issue) and Part II (Spring Issue) of this 5-part series, we tried to unravel some of the confusion and mystique surrounding the position of “Chef” or “Executive Chef” in the healthcare setting. We covered the following issues up to this point:

1. Why hire an Executive Chef in healthcare?
2. What does a Chef or Executive Chef do in healthcare?
3. Who may call themselves a Chef or Executive Chef?
4. What is the difference between a Certified Chef and a non-Certified Chef?
5. What are the different ranks or levels of Certified Chefs?
6. Should you hire a Certified or non-Certified Chef?
7. The challenges in hiring an Executive Chef.
8. A brief job description for a Chef in healthcare based on a survey of HFM members.
9. What will you have to pay an Executive Chef in healthcare?
10. Why Chefs are willing to move from restaurants and hotels to healthcare and possibly take a pay cut?

Note – See back issues of the Innovator for answers to these questions.



When advertising for an Executive Chef, keep in mind that there is a high probability that you will end up with a person making a change from restaurants and hotels to healthcare. If so, then one must keep in mind that your potential chef may be coming from a work environment that is totally different than most healthcare settings. Understanding the differences will help you advertise and recruit the right person for your department. As we mentioned in Parts I and II, hiring the right Chef for your department is not an easy task. Hiring the wrong person has caused some directors to go through turmoil and dysfunction.

## **Restaurants/Hotels vs. Healthcare – Work Environment Differences**

1. In restaurants and hotels, the Executive Chef is the department head in the foodservice department. In most hospitals (99%), the Executive Chef is not the department head. To avoid any misunderstanding, it is best to state clearly in an advertisement for an Executive Chef that the individual will be reporting to the department head who is directly in charge of foodservice. In the interview, you will need to point out that in healthcare, the department head sets or approves all department standards, menus, recipes, etc. The Chef coming from restaurants or hotels will not be accustomed to working so closely with a department head that calls the shots. In restaurants and hotels, the Chef usually calls the shots, so this difference needs to be made clear in both the advertisement and the interview process.
2. As everyone is aware, some Chefs tend to have well-developed egos. While this is true with any profession, it seems to be more so in the culinary field. It is imperative that we discover whether or not the candidates' ego will allow them to fit into a team environment where they are just one member of the management crew. Some Chefs have a very hard time working with a whole team of managers who may have an equal say on what is served and when it will be served, etc. So, be sure to describe the work environment very carefully in the interview process.
3. In some cases, the foodservice employees in healthcare are treated differently than employees in restaurants and hotels. In hospitals, the foodservice management teams have been conditioned in the art of human resources management. In healthcare, management teams are taught to:
  1. Treat employees with the utmost of dignity and respect.
  2. Set an example by being consistent and fair.
  3. Conduct yourself beyond reproach.
  4. Never counsel or yell at someone in front of other employees.
  5. Don't curse at or around the staff.
  6. Follow HR guidelines closely with regard to hiring, counseling and termination procedures.

So, screen for this in the interview process and mention in your ad that you are looking for someone with excellent **human resources management and leadership skills**. In an ideal world, HR would verify this skill/style before the candidate is interviewed by the food service department. This doesn't always happen, so to be sure, the FSD should also screen for this skill. A competent, successful Chef will have both HR management skills and culinary skills. One is of no value without the other. In fact, it is wise to find out what kind of HR management environment the candidate is accustomed to working in and what environment they think is best.

4. I have interviewed new graduates from city colleges and the like and discovered that some of them couldn't answer simple questions such as how to prepare a pot roast or what the definition of braising is. Upon further questioning, it was clear that attending a local non-premier culinary school for 1 or 2 years is not a guarantee of culinary skills or food knowledge. These schools play an important role in the industry, and there are no doubt some excellent non-premier culinary schools. However, we've found that the Chefs who have trained at the premier schools are more knowledgeable. The bottom line is that not all culinary schools are equal. Don't presume culinary expertise just because a candidate graduated from a culinary college and has worked many years in restaurants.

The premier culinary schools in the U.S. include:

- The Culinary Institute of America
  - Johnson & Whales
  - The California Culinary Academy
  - and several others
5. Some Chefs have spent most of their careers in the world of "make to order", preparing only a few servings at a time. Some Chefs may not have worked closely with food for many years and even then it wasn't institutional food. So, it is best if you prepare a pre-set list of questions to validate the food knowledge and culinary skills of the candidate:

### **Questions to Test Culinary Knowledge in the Interview Process**

1. What is the definition of:
  - a. Braising
  - b. Roasting
  - c. Sautéing
2. What is the difference between braising and roasting?
3. What type or cut of meat is most generally used for braising? Why?
4. What type of beef is most generally used for roasting? Why?
5. What temperature do you set the convection oven at for roasting "top" or "inside" round? Why?
6. When was the last time you prepared pot roast, meatloaf or salisbury steak?
7. What is the internal temperature of boneless, skinless chicken breast when it is done and safe, according to HAACP?
8. What is HAACP?

9. What happens when you over-mix meatloaf?
10. What happens when you over-mix muffins?
11. When roasting a raw turkey breast, what is the minimal internal temperature when you remove the meat from the oven? Why?
12. According to HAACP, what is the minimal internal temperature for cooked turkey breast for it to be safe?
13. Name the mother sauces.
14. When was the last time you prepared a mother sauce?
15. Describe a mother sauce and the process for making it.
16. Do you have a problem using a convenience product, such as lasagna?
17. We are required to utilize a specific brand of x, y, and z. Do you have a problem with that?
18. We utilize a prime vendor to purchase 80% of our products. Do you have a problem with that?

Many experienced chefs will not be able to provide the technically correct answers to the culinary questions above with certainty. Consequently, what we're looking for is a well thought out, educated guess that is in the "ballpark" of the correct answer. Observing and listening to the candidate try to come up with an intelligent answer reveals a lot about their general culinary knowledge, cognitive skills, ability to handle stress, ego, personality, etc. Garnering these insights is just as important as finding out if they know the answers to the questions.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Carefully considering the above information in the recruitment process will help ensure that you get the best suited person for your foodservice department. In my opinion, a qualified, team oriented, Executive Chef is the missing link to success on many hospital foodservice teams. Fortunately, the need for and value that a Chef brings to the table is well known now. The challenge is to hire the right Chef for your department.

## **Next Article**

In the next article, Part IV of this series, we will prepare suggested text for an Executive Chef advertisement. We will also give you the answers to the culinary questions from this article. Most importantly, we will provide some insights into how to accurately gauge the culinary knowledge of a chef candidate.

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## **About the Author**

Don Miller (“Chef Don”) is a graduate of California State Polytechnic University. He is one of only a few individuals in the country to hold the combined credentials of Certified executive Chef and Registered Dietitian. Following a highly decorated career as a healthcare foodservice Director, Don has become a noted professional speaker and the owner of a successful consulting firm promoting performance improvement in healthcare facilities.