

Unlocking the Mystique of the Chef

Part 5 of 5

The Characteristics of a Successful Chef

By
Don Miller, RD, CEC
Executive Success Coach
Principal, Don Miller & Associates
chefdon.com chefdon@cox.net



In the first four parts of this series of articles on “Unlocking the Mystique of the Chef”, we have covered several basic and important points in the quest to add a qualified Executive Chef to your team:

1. Hiring the right Executive Chef is very tricky business.
2. Hiring the wrong Executive Chef is common and comes with serious consequences for a Food Service Director.
3. Hiring the right Executive Chef can do wonders for the department but should not be considered the solution to all issues and concerns in the operation.

If you are in the market for an Executive Chef we recommend that you read all 5 parts of this series before you begin to move forward.

Once you have hired a promising candidate as an Executive Chef, the work of ensuring your mutual success begins. His/her management style needs to be analyzed, strengths re-enforced, and weaknesses improved. We call an Executive Chef that maintains a winning management style a Catalytic Leader™. In the opinion of most Executive Success Coaches, this is the same style of leadership that should be practiced by all leaders.

A Catalytic Leader™ is one that is able to lead a team from Good to Best™. Most teams have not reached “Best” (the “10” level) yet, and have hit a plateau at “Good” because they lack this type of leadership and management style. The characteristics of a successful Chef listed

here are not all inclusive, but they are the ones that we believe will have the biggest influence on your success with the Executive Chef on your team.

THE QUALITIES OF CATALYTIC LEADERSHIP™ **(Characteristics of a Successful Chef)**

Preface – Most leaders (not just chefs) will read this and think “I know all this stuff”. We would agree. However, after many years of coaching in the field we have discovered that “it’s not about what you know; it’s about what you do with what you know everyday”. Our coaches spend 30% of their time helping management teams fine tune their leadership skills and management styles.

Personal Style

- Passionate and enthusiastic about their work. This should be palpable! A team member should be inspired by the very presence of their leader.
- Kind, nurturing, caring, patient, calm, efficient, effective, functional, organized.

Management Style

- Leads by Example
 - Believes that the organizational goals and objectives can be achieved with the resources available.
 - Is loyal to the department’s goals and objectives.
 - Maintains a positive, up beat, optimistic demeanor. When the leader enters the playing field, he/she should immediately assume the characteristics of a Catalytic Leader™. If this doesn’t come naturally, the leader should pretend that he/she is an actor in a show with a happy upbeat personality-- seriously!
 - Celebrates results often. What gets celebrated will get repeated.
 - Is on time for everything
 - Pays attention to detail
 - Is persistent
 - Doesn’t lose track of the basics: Quality, Service, Sanitation and Safety
- Fully engaged with their team – not distant, unavailable or “hands-off”. Encourages and inspires team members to unleash their talents and skills within existing guidelines and without fear of failure. Empowers team members to “fly” within given guidelines.

Communication Style

- Communicates so that each team member is totally informed at all times. This can be accomplished by:
 - Using a log book which team members must initial before starting work each day.
 - Daily huddles
 - Formal weekly meetings.

Accountability

- Ensures that Sous Chefs or Lead Cooks are also Catalytic Leaders™.
- Sets very clear standards in a collaborative manner, such as creating the job routines for each position and keeping them up to date and posted.

- Holds team members accountable 100% of the time.
 - *Accountability Law #1* – “Whatever you accept from your least effective team member becomes the minimum acceptable standard for the whole team.” Author – Don Miller
 - *Accountability Law #2* – “Failure to hold team members accountable for doing their jobs in accordance with the established standards creates an unfair work environment. This unfairness can escalate to an overwhelmingly negative work environment delivering poor food, poor service, hostility and high turnover. All of these factors can cost a fortune!” Author – Don Miller

These qualities of Catalytic Leadership™ apply not only to the Executive Chef, but to every member of the management team in Healthcare Food Service. It is a good idea to re-examine the qualities of the whole leadership team when making a new team addition or embarking on major changes. We find that the most common issues preventing Management Teams from achieving Good to Best™ are a direct result of the lack of these qualities. Many leaders do not actively audit their management style to ensure that they are engaged and lead by example. They often fail to hold their employees accountable creating an unfair work environment, or they fail to have adequate and clear standards. They may also fail to create an overall culture that is positive as well as customer service oriented.

Unfortunately, most facilities think they are doing better in these areas than they really are, particularly in the area of accountability. We find that almost all facilities need work in this area. A Catalytic Leader™ whether the CEO of the hospital or the Food Service Director is able to objectively analyze their operation in order to build a winning environment enabling their team to Breakthrough to Best™.

A CASE STUDY IN CATALYTIC LEADERSHIP

Carlton Green, PhD, Vice President, Don Miller & Associates was able to spark a miracle at UCLA Medical Center when he was the Food Service Director. In one year, his operation saved \$11,000,000 in expenses, increased revenue by \$1,200,000 and increased Press Ganey scores to the 98th percentile. What caused this? The team became inspired because Carlton utilized a Catalytic Leadership™ style: he was caring and nurturing, yet he held people accountable. Carlton’s team was recognized with the Silver Plate Award. Catalytic leadership gets results! For more on Catalytic Leadership™ email Carlton Green at chefdon@cox.net.



Carlton Green, Ph.D.
Catalytic Leader

THE POWER OF THE CHEFS UNIFORM

Many chefs underestimate the power of the Chef's uniform. Savvy chefs dress for the show! Don't forget to inform your Executive Chef how he/she is to dress while on duty. Don't assume a Chef knows how to dress for success. We recommend a pressed white chef's coat with colored piping or colored buttons (or both) and a standard molded disposable chef's hat (called a toque). If the chef is so tall that he/she is unable to teach or engage in cooking without bumping into the hoods, a clean attractive ball cap, beret or beanie is an option. However, we find that once a Chef begins switching hats, he/she ends up not wearing the toque. So beware. When the Executive Chef is seen out of the department, especially in the café, the Chef's toque should be worn. The general public recognizes a traditional Chef's uniform with a toque as a symbol of professionalism and a sharply attired Chef enhances the overall department image more than most people realize.

THE POWER OF THE TOQUE

Another type of hair covering that some chefs are wearing is called a beanie. A beanie is like a baseball cap without the "bill" or "brim". It is functional for the back of the house (kitchen) but if worn in the dining room or cafeteria (front of the house) the powerful impact is severely reduced. Be careful! It matters. Many chefs don't understand the power of the toque.



**Quote from Chef Joe Eidem, CEC, AAC, Food Service Director
Washoe Medical Center, Reno, Nevada**

"If you're a Chef, you wear a Chef's hat (toque)! My entire production crew is required to wear Chef's hats. They look great, feel great, and people notice big time. It does make a difference."

Joe is a Certified Executive Chef and a member of the American Academy of Chefs. He is heavily involved in the American Culinary Federation.

A UNIQUE PHENOMENON

We have experienced the power of proper chef's attire first hand. Over the years, there have been times when one of our chefs merely walked through the hospital café or the dining room of a long term facility and suddenly the customers believed the food tasted better—just because they saw a professional in traditional Chef's attire. In most cases nothing had changed with the food or the cooks yet; just seeing a Chef in an attractive uniform in the building provided a powerful psychological impact.

THE BAR HAS BEEN RAISED

As we travel and coach we have noticed that every hospital seems to want to be "the best" now. The bar has been raised to the highest level. Make sure that you and your new Executive Chef are prepared for this unique challenge.

We hope that this series of articles, “Unlocking the Mystique of the Chef”, has been helpful to you in your endeavor to become the Best. You may want to save the articles as you won’t find a lot of this information in a book – not yet anyway! 😊

Best Wishes To You

Don Miller