



The Real World

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This chapter provides real-world situations and solutions, plus general tips and tricks they've used. One size does not fit all, and just because a situation was handled a certain way does not mean that was the only correct solution. These passages come directly from working personal chefs who have generously and willingly shared their information & experiences. Many of these feedbacks were provided before social media took off.

The wording has been formatted to provide a situation, a question and a solution.

No information within this pdf will be included in the examination series.

Sailing Guests

The Situation

You live in a resort community and the summer season is upon you. You have just received a request to prepare dinners for sailing guests. The owner says she needs dinners for six or eight people on her sailboat and sometimes at her summer home. She says she often does not know until 48 to 24 hours in advance. In the past, she would call a friend who was a caterer/restaurant owner, but the friend is no longer available. In addition, the woman making the request seemed demanding. Demanding or not, you want her as a client, and you want to provide a good service to her because it sounds like a great opportunity. The excursions are typically three days and the craft is approximately 40 feet in length (which is not a lot of room when the boat is loaded with gear and people).

The Question

What foods should you consider?

The Response

The sailboat client should probably be forewarned that with so little notice (i.e., 24-48 hours), you might already be booked. However, an opportunity such as providing a service on a sailboat can be great fun! If you choose to accept the client, just be imaginative and have fun with the request – make it worth your while! Consider making entrées that will not “slosh.” For example, you wouldn’t want to prepare soups! Think about using buffet-type foods. And if there is a grill available, use it. This will facilitate food preparation in that you can use a simple marinade for meat, fish, and shrimp. Also consider grilling vegetables prepped in foil, as well as twice-baked potatoes. Pasta salads would be a pleasant addition, along with finger foods, such as mini-cheesecakes in cupcake liners for dessert.



The Real World

Furthermore, consider that the client may go to port for some meals. Brainstorm ideas for stocking the craft for a three-day excursion. Being ingenious and resourceful in providing the provisions can be very challenging, but the task will be much appreciated! With planning, there are plenty of little cubbyholes for storage. Make sure everything is in absolute airtight containers – even boxes and Baggies will absorb way too much moisture. Concentrated juice boxes are great since they are compact and soft sided. Try using more products such as these. Ask if the client will be using a microwave, oven, or stove for reheating. You might also consider storing food at the client's home. Precook entrées prior to sailing and then serve them chilled. Spreads, firm dips, with crackers, veggies and fruits for dipping are good snacks. If you are providing breakfast, individual quiches (cupcake size), frittatas, breakfast strata, and even some really awesome cinnamon rolls or breakfast breads with favored butters will make a great morning start.

Finger-foods, that are individually sized, non-messy, and spill-proof are good choices and don't require any special presentation. They can still be simple and impressive, so don't worry about making them extra "picnic-like" or "boat-like." Also, some pasta dishes look very elegant, keep well, and may be served either heated or chilled. Just remember to use fork-friendly pastas, such as penne or rigatoni, rather than spaghetti or noodles. The latter options are not as easy to serve and eat on a boat.

House Bound

The Situation

You have received a call from a woman who lives in New York. She would like to hire you as a personal chef for her relatives, a retired couple who live in the same area as you do in Florida. However, only two meals a week are requested, just enough to give the couple some variety apart from their usual order-out meals. They are housebound, but have neighbors that take them out to eat

occasionally. In addition, the couple does not want any frozen food, only fresh food is desired.

The Question

Should you accept the request and cook for just two meals a week?

The Response

Some personal chefs may not want to do this service because they feel that they should only offer the standard five meals – four servings, nothing less...but perhaps more. Their goal is to make \$200 - \$300 or more a day and a two-meal service just does not fit that bill. However, the key here is that it is your business. So, really think about what is beneficial to you and how you want to build and develop your business.

Some people see a personal chef service as a "treat" to themselves. They look forward to your cooking for them once a week or once every eight weeks, whatever the case may be. They may have your meals once a week, and then have a dinner party with four of the servings where they rave about it with their friends!



The Real World

Consider whether this service could be done as a second service for the day. You could go over to the couple's home after completing a service at another client's home. For example, you could make the couple two dinners that are either quick and easy or duplicated from the other client that day (with regards, of course, to their personal preferences). This way, you would have all your equipment packed and you are not consuming an entire day for two meals. As far as pricing for this type of service, perhaps asking for a flat rate per hour plus groceries, or half of your regular service price would be appropriate. Charge more if you are not able to piggyback the smaller service with service.

Large Groups

The Situation

You are panicked and need help! You are a new personal chef, and have been asked to prepare a Christmas party buffet for 25 people. You have noticed that many personal chefs charge food costs plus an hourly rate. Baffled at how other personal chefs handle large parties that are even sometimes larger than this - you wonder if they are using commercial kitchens.

The Question

How do you charge for large events? How do you control the time aspect? For example, what do you do if you estimate that it will take seven hours and it takes closer to nine hours? And, should you get paid in advance or after your service is rendered?

The Response

Dinner parties are a great way to make extra money and get your services known.

With restaurants packed on the weekends and holidays, it is not uncommon for people to want to avoid the crowds and provide a more personal and comfortable holiday dining experience in their own homes. In addition, people want time to spend with their family and friends and not necessarily stress over a large dinner. Typically, during the holidays, caterers are overbooked as well, hence, an opportunity for the personal chef to step in arises.

Finding a commercial kitchen that is convenient and suitable (and properly certified) for preparing food for a large event is not an easy task. During the holidays, it is virtually impossible. Some personal chefs have been successful using a community center that has a large certified kitchen. However, it is imperative that you are aware of the legalities of using a commercial kitchen since they vary from one community to another. Because of these legalities, it is not unheard of to prepare for a large event in the client's home. In fact, it is recommended. Many personal chefs who are providing services for large groups hire helpers. To cover costs adequately, they may charge three times the food costs and have their helpers paid directly by the client. The personal chef designs the menu, determines the cost, and, upon approval, collects half of the dinner's cost in advance. The other half is paid the night of the event. Be sure to get the details of the event in writing, and make sure you are clear about matters of gratuity.



The Real World

It is sometimes easy to be lax in what you charge because you do not want to overprice your service. However, remember that you are providing a great service and are probably worth more (especially if the date falls on a holiday). You may also want to consider charging an additional hourly service rate if the client asks you to "plate" and serve the food. This is typically charged at the rate of three or so hours of additional service. This service is, of course, optional. The client may wish to plate and serve the food him or herself.

Determine a price per plate depending upon the food items the client chooses. If you have a client hesitating over the price for one of the courses, provide a course cost breakdown (price per individual serving and total for the entire party). For example, perhaps the client is debating dessert, thinking that they can make their own dessert while you handle the other courses. By providing several different desserts to choose from and providing individual prices, very similar to restaurant prices, clients may become convinced to add the dessert. This also serves to make the client feel in control. They can decide if the salad is worth \$3.00 a plate, or if the entrée is a \$30.00 entrée, or if the dessert is worth \$5.00 - \$8.00. If the prices are comparable to restaurant prices, chances are they will agree with your price. Be careful not to undervalue your service.

Here is another example of how to price any recipe. Create a list of ingredients found at the store where you shop and write down the price of each ingredient. Then take a copy of the recipe and write down how much each ingredient in the recipe costs. For example, if eggs are \$1.29 per dozen, then one egg is \$.1075, and nine eggs are \$.97. Add up the total cost of the recipe and divide it by the number of servings to find the food cost. Divide by the percent amount you want to allocate for food costs (perhaps, one third). This means that, if the cost for food in a cake amounted to \$1.48, you would divide that amount by .33 (33%). This will make your food cost come to 4.484. Now you can charge the client \$4.50 per serving. If the client needs 12 servings, it will cost \$54.

Clients frequently request two appetizers (not individually plated), salad, entrée, and dessert. Preparing items as much in advance as you can in the client's home, will alleviate a lot of stress. Then you can finish the preparations on the day of the event. The main idea behind any service is "planning!"

A common mistake personal chefs make while planning parties relates to the dessert. For example, preparing something like *Death By Chocolate Cake*, is very time consuming and the ingredients alone can run up your food costs. As with any service, money will be lost unless you give careful consideration to the menu plan and recipes, as well as time efficiencies and cost effectiveness.



The Real World

Barter

The Situation

You have a happy problem and need some suggestions. A lady who is a licensed massage therapist and her partner, a yoga instructor, are very interested in your service. They want to barter their services for yours. You are more than willing to do so, but after accepting the offer, you realize you have no idea what constitutes a "fair" exchange.

The Question

How does bartering typically work out? How is a fair trade established? For example, does "fair" mean trading services straight across the table once a month, twice a month, or receiving a percentage off? What tax responsibilities does bartering present?

The Response

Bartering occurs when you exchange goods or services without exchanging money. An example of bartering is a plumber doing repair work for a dentist in exchange for dental services. The fair market value of goods and services exchanged must be included in the income of both parties.

Income from bartering is taxable in the year in which you receive the goods or services.

Personal chefs have also bartered their services in exchange for an advertisement in a local specialty newspaper targeted to professionals. For instance, an ad is in a monthly publication for three months and the personal chef services are rendered through gift certificates in equal value to the ad. The expiration date of the gift certificates is three months from the date of issue. However, sometimes the personal chefs do not get a response from the newspaper ad and, therefore, feel as if the barter was not a good trade. But, honoring the gift certificates creates a positive business image and the personal chefs receive tips and leads for potentially more work from the newspaper personnel. Often, bartering results in mixed feelings. Usually, positive feelings result if the barter is for a service both parties can agree upon, will enjoy, and can see some residual benefit.

More times than not, bartering pays off for most people involved. One particular chef approached a local health club about teaching some cooking classes in return for a display table with brochures and cards, etc. The personal chef suggested classes like a low-fat cooking tips class, a gluten-free baking class, and a cooking with soy class. The club loved the idea! They liked the idea of providing a service to their members regarding healthy eating. Although the personal chef did not cook for the class since there isn't a full kitchen, (handouts which the gym photocopied), some samples, and some visual aids (gadgets, cookbooks, etc.) were brought in to enhance the class.

This was quite a success story for the personal chef as the club put the classes in the member newsletter and there were at least six club locations. The club also made some great posters and placed an ad in the local daily newspaper. The display table and the class generated many referrals and the personal chef booking clients right and left. All that was spent was time and the little bit of money to get some snacks made up to hand out along with the brochures.



The Real World

. When compared to other advertising dollars, the money spent (or not spent) for this opportunity was well worth the effort.

Another personal chef just started bartering her service in order to keep her personal trainer at the local fitness center. She teaches two cooking classes a month, one of which is a class on nutrition. The club pays for the food and the personal chef's personal training three days a week. The personal chef has received five leads from this opportunity, and after just two classes, picked up one client. Her only cost has been approximately three hours of preparation time for the 90-minute cooking class.

Taking this concept a step further, two other personal chefs used an idea to incorporate their service into their gym's "total wellness" program. They work with clients one-on-one to determine the clients' fitness needs, vitamins, etc. Next they add food as an available component. This component will be similar to a 14-meal program geared towards weight reduction (They use an available commercial kitchen for this). The trainer, a nutritionist, and the two personal chefs created a balanced meal plan that can be purchased as a total package. The package consists of five meals per day, 60% carbohydrates, 30% protein and 10% fat program; however, they will not provide all five meals. They have bartered services with the trainer since and have already received two new clients who are gym customers as a result. The personal chefs wholeheartedly agreed that this was a good marketing area for them.

Firing A Client

The Situation

Friday you worked for the most abusive person you have met in three years of cooking. The man was nasty to his wife; rude to you, and rude to everyone he called on the phone while you were there. You like working with his wife and would love to cook for her as long as he isn't anywhere near you. He told his wife that he doesn't trust you and that one or both of them need to be in the home while you cook. You have never said two words to him and haven't got a clue why he is so uncouth. You feel you need to drop them as clients because you have decided you are not going to work somewhere where you need to watch and listen to a man verbally abuse his spouse or others.

The Question

How do you tactfully tell his wife not to call upon your services anymore?

The Response

The following comments are a collaboration of opinions. They are not to be used as legal advice. The comments are provided simply as "food for thought" and illustrate what others have thought about or felt in similar difficulties.



The Real World

Some feel that one tactful option in telling someone they are "fired" as a client is to tell them that you are very sorry, but you will not be available due to your full schedule and you won't be able to add more clients at this time. That way there is no blame or negative feelings. Most folks would agree 100% that you should not cook for anyone who is abusive or who doesn't trust you. There just isn't enough money in the world that will make it worthwhile.

If you don't feel comfortable working for them, then you shouldn't. Trust your instincts and intuition. As previously mentioned, use the excuse that you just cannot cook for them because your roster is full and then wish them well. But, if you feel strongly about continuing to work with them, consider renting a commercial kitchen and continue the service (just do not provide the service in their home).

In a parallel situation, another chef has a new client that lives quite far from her. However, her client works locally, so the personal chef is renting a commercial kitchen and she is charging her client for the rental. The client is happy with the arrangement because she gets the service that she would otherwise have to do without. That may be an option if you'd like to keep cooking for someone who has a home situation that is less preferable to you. No matter what you decide, make a decision that will allow you to be at peace with yourself.

Another option, although more difficult, might be to tell both husband and wife why you cannot cook for them any longer. The best thing about running your own business is that you don't have to work for unkind people. If a person is told "why" you don't want to work for them, then maybe they will think twice about their words and actions next time.

Some people don't see or understand their actions until consequences (such as losing a great service) are imposed and they become forced to look at themselves in the mirror. Writing a letter may be easier than speaking to them in person (again, use your instincts and good judgment). Perhaps saying that you feel you are currently exposed to a work environment that does not meet your will get the message across. Either way, a professionally written letter will allow you to avoid a face to face interaction while still addressing the issue and documenting your decision.

Other personal chefs would argue that telling the client about why you are discontinuing their service isn't going to make one bit of difference in the way he or she treats people. Many people believe an opinion that rude people should just be told that you are too busy. Nothing you say will make any change in either of them. These chefs believe that the client will change their ways (and get help if necessary) when and only when they are ready.



The Real World

Half A Million People, And Still No Business!

The Situation

In a city of over half a million people, you are just starting your business and you feel the market is slow in getting you started in the personal chef industry. You have heard about other personal chefs who are up and running in less than a year and wonder what it is you are doing wrong. You have had media exposure three times and are on a referral system, yet you still haven't generated enough business to even think about going full time. You have mailed brochures to doctors' offices and lawyers. In addition, you have car signs and have dropped brochures to neighbors of the few clients you do have, all of which has not generated any business.

The Question

What are some economical ideas about how to move your business along the road to success?

The Response

Let's first assume other aspects of your service are not at fault for the lack of business generated. For example, let us assume that the way your phone is answered is professional, your appearance and poise is professional, as well as the appearance of your marketing materials. Let us also assume your service is timely and the foods prepared are exquisite!

A reality of doing business, especially in larger cities, is that you might disappear into the crowd if you wait for referrals or word of mouth to generate business. Word of mouth works, but it does not generate work nor *brand recognition* immediately. Find a medium, any medium that works for you and in which your name will appear constantly. This consistency will establish a building block towards name brand recognition. In other words, unless you are paid to write a column or have a show, or find some other way to create *constant* publicity, you will have to take out an ad.

For some people, ads are not economical, but if you are working in a large market (more than 1/2 million people), you will have to take advertisements into consideration, especially if there are other people already competing with you under the guise of personal chef, personalized catering, personal take-out, home meal replacements, etc.

Advertising is an investment and not an expense because a good, well-targeted ad will generate the business necessary to pay itself off.

Also, ask yourself "Of the business I have generated, where did the response come from?" Was the response due to an ad? Was the ad placed in newspapers, magazines, or community papers? Keeping track of what responses are generated from each particular medium will also help you pinpoint which medium is working for you and which ones are not.



The Real World

Effective ads:

- ❖ Target the right audience.
- ❖ Combine visual magnetism with text to draw readers in.
- ❖ Promise a reward.
- ❖ Back up the promise.
- ❖ Present the selling proposition logically.
- ❖ Talk person-to-person.
- ❖ Are easy to read.
- ❖ Stress the product or service, not the source of the product or service.
- ❖ Reflect the character of the organization.

Tip: Periodically change the wording every few weeks, or perhaps the ad border or picture. Sometimes, when people see the same ad over and over again, they tend to tune it out or not see it. Change the headline every few weeks, don't put your business name as the headline. Instead, and use a catchy by-line. Creativity is the key, along with being concise.

Public Relations vs. Advertising

Public relations can help build a successful business. But what are public relations and how does it differ from advertising?

Public relations and advertising can be seen as opposites. You pay for advertising, for your message to be placed in a newspaper or on TV or radio. Public relations, however, is free. Your business and service is featured in an article, be it broadcast or print, and is free of charge. A reporter writes about your services as a result of information he or she received and researched.

Yet some businesses succeed and others fail despite the same public relations coverage. The difference is between how the business handled their public relations opportunity. The key to securing publicity is identifying your target market and developing a well-thought-out public relations campaign. The following seven steps will get your personal chef service noticed:

1. Write your business' positioning statement. In one or two sentences, state what it is that makes your personal chef service unique. Write down your own thoughts, ask others what they think is unique about your service and add their statements as well. Writing down everything that's important and unique about your business will force you to review the statements carefully and confirm that the statements convey exactly what you want to communicate to your customer.

2. List your objectives. Answer the question, "What do I hope to achieve for my business through this publicity plan?" Prioritize your top five goals, be specific and set deadlines.



The Real World

3. Identify your target audience. Who are they? Where do they live? What age group are they and what are their interests? What are their lifestyles, incomes and buying habits?

4. Identify your target media. Once you fully understand your target audience, learn what media they are watching, reading, and listening to. Make a list of these outlets and call them to ask whom you should contact regarding your area of business. Make a list for each medium; list the names and contact information (e.g., phone numbers, email address, mailing address, fax number) of reporters that cover your area so that you may contact him or her directly.

5. Develop story angles. Allow yourself to be creative. Think of stories you have read and found interesting. Brainstorm ideas to be developed into your own story. For example, one angle could be to donate personal chef services to a local retirement home providing unique holiday dishes that meet dietary requirements. Another angle might be to alert the local media of a trend in your area. Perhaps the local health clubs are helping you book engagements into the middle of next year because you help meet the dietary needs of their customers in training.

6. Make the pitch. Before calling the reporter you have identified as covering your area, write a one-page letter relating your business to the target medium's audience. This is your initial pitch to the reporter, so start with an interesting question or fact. It's important to be brief. Include your contact information and be sure the letter is sent to the appropriate reporter.

7. Follow up. Reporters are busy and under deadlines so it will be important for you to follow up. This is the key to securing coverage. Wait four to six days after you have sent the pitch letter then call the reporter. If you have to leave a voice mail and the reporter does not call you back, call again until you can talk to him or her on the phone. However, do not leave a second message within five days of the first. If the reporter requests additional information, send it immediately and follow up to confirm receipt. Remember to be courteous and ask if the reporter has time to speak with you. If not, offer to call back at a more convenient time. If the reporter can talk to you, keep your initial pitch to 20 seconds; afterward, offer to send written information to support your story ideas.

PR Pointers

Be sure to include your positioning statement in any correspondence and press releases you send to the media. If a reporter rejects your story idea, ask if he or she can refer you to someone else who might be interested. Know exactly what you are going to say before you telephone the reporter. Have it written down in front of you - it's easier, and you'll feel and sound more confident.

Everyone likes a compliment. If you have read a story you particularly enjoyed that was written by the reporter you're contacting, let him or her know. This will also show that you are familiar with the reporter's work.



The Real World

Be persistent. Remember, not everyone will be interested. If your story idea is turned down, try to find out why and use that information to improve your next pitch. Just keep going, and don't give up. You will succeed eventually.

Don't be a pest. You can be persistent without being annoying. Use your instincts: if the reporter sounds rushed, offer to call back.

Be helpful and become a resource by providing reporters with information. Remember, they need your story ideas. There's only so much they can come up with on their own.

Always remember that assistants get promoted. Be nice to everyone you speak with, no matter how low they are on the totem pole. After you establish a connection, keep in touch - you never know where people will end up.

Say 'thank you.' When you succeed in getting publicity for your business, always write a thank-you note to the reporter who worked on it with you. You'd be surprised how much a note means. Plan your publicity efforts just as you plan the rest of your business. You'll be glad you made the effort when you see your company featured in the news - and when you see the results in your bottom line.

The Editor Rejected My Pitch!

The Situation

You have just moved to a rather affluent town. This town has a local free newspaper and it seems everyone reads it. It is a great paper full of small town news, events and advertisements for local businesses. You decide to drop off a pre-written press release, information, and print material regarding your new personal chef business. In addition, you leave a food sample (e.g., Asian noodle

salad) along with a recipe for the dish. The editor was there and you did your best to be charming. You introduced yourself, told him that you had just moved to the area, gave him the materials including the food and told him that you are interested in advertising. However, his only reply was "We do not do press releases or stories on businesses because we survive on advertising."

The Question

You do plan to advertise with them, but after this initial rejection, what should your next move be? You really want to get a story in that paper because you really feel it will help your business get off the ground.

The Response

Some personal chefs have successfully gotten around this type of obstacle by inquiring whether the paper has a food columnist. If not, there is your potential way in. Offer to write a food column once a month, twice a month, or how ever often you feel comfortable.



The Real World

Let the editor know that the only payment you expect is to have a by-line with your name, business name, phone number and/or email address. Voila! It's a win/win situation. They get an interesting feature for their paper. You get PR.

Some personal chefs may be asking, "What types of things would I write about in a food column?" You can write about so many things. Perhaps you could write about a seasonal fruit, vegetable, or something for a holiday that falls within that month. For example, January's column might be about Super Bowl food. February's column could be about chocolate for Valentine's Day with a super easy truffle recipe. You can approach column writing using one of two tactics. The first is to write so that your column may appeal to the masses, sticking with readily available ingredients and mainstream foods with easy recipes. This will also make writing the columns challenging for you as you strive to make each column interesting and innovative. The second tactic is to write a column appealing to the eccentric, using harder to find ingredients and more challenging recipes. Of course, there's nothing wrong with combining the two approaches.

Other ideas may be to write about nutrition and restaurant reviews. Just be sure to remain objective, especially when writing reviews since no one wants to receive poor publicity. Read other columnist's articles for more ideas. Just remember to be the same charming person on paper that you are in person, and you will write a great column!

To combat the stress of coming up with something new every month, network with other columnists to brainstorm ideas and topics. However, be sure to give credit where credit is due. For example, if you cannot come up with original recipes every month, then give credit to the friend or family member who supplied you with the recipe and/or cite the source.

Should Prices Be Included In Literature?

The Situation

While collecting other industry brochures and information packets, you see that some businesses include pricing information while others do not. Now that you are putting together a client folder that includes a brochure, sample menus, etc., you have to decide if you should include your pricing.

The Question

Is it better to show the prices or not? You want to be informative; however, you also don't want to provide too much information.

The Response

Typically, pricing is not included in literature. More often it is included in a cover letter that is sent out with the brochure and other marketing materials. More preferably, pricing is discussed at the in-home interview. One reason for not including prices in the brochure is to keep prices flexible.



The Real World

Meeting client needs means being somewhat accommodating. You may have standard prices for some entrées; however, until you understand the client's specific needs (such as food preferences or special diets) you won't be able to give prices. Also, what if a potential client lives quite a ways out of town? You will not want your brochure to dictate how much to charge for going the extra mile. In addition, you may have to charge more for additional family members. Remember, this is a *personal* service, and price is also based on personal needs.

A personal chef who did put prices in a brochure expressed regret later. In his opinion, a lot of people don't completely understand the value they get with the service until they hear it described and including prices in his information generated fewer calls. If your prices are not in your brochures, you are more likely to receive calls from those who are interested in learning more and you will have the opportunity to sell them the service.

How NOT To Respond To A Customer

The Situation

An enthusiastic personal chef sends a brochure via email as a Microsoft Word (MS Word) attachment.

The Question

What's wrong with sending a brochure via email as a MS Word attachment?

The Response

1) The document is in MS word. What if the recipient doesn't have MS word? Or, what if they have MS word, but not a current version? In either case, the potential client will not be able to read the brochure. This translates to poor marketing - which translates as bad for the personal chef.

2) If the customer has another software program that is capable of interpreting other file formats (i.e., Word Perfect) it is possible they will be able to view the brochure. However, when a file goes through this interpretive transformation, information usually gets jumbled up, making it difficult and sometimes impossible to read. This also reflects poorly upon you, and is, therefore, bad for the personal chef.

3) It's an attachment. With the proliferation of computer viruses and their primary mode of transportation being through attachments, this email is subject to being deleted as an act of precaution - without ever being read. You guessed it; this is bad for the personal chef. The most opportune way to provide initial information is via the telephone interview, leading to an appointment for the in-home interview with presentation folder in hand.



The Real World

To Condos Or Not To Condos

The Situation

Two personal chefs working as partners have a fairly lucrative personal chef and catering company. They are looking for ways to find ten more clients. They are based in Chicago and think that condos are the way to go. In this way, they could handle two clients a day without excessive travel time. Their service is weekly at \$165 for five entrées - sides count as half an entrée, and desserts and soups count as one entrée. Clients pay for groceries plus additional mileage if they are located outside of Chicago. The partners currently have eight solid repeat clients and at least one catered event a week. However, one of the partners feels that if they get ten weekly clients each, invest 25% back into their company, they would both walk away with \$54,000 a year in pre-tax annual income! This income would come from Home Meal Replacement clients only, and not from any catered events or classes that they also teach.

The Question

So, condos or not, are there any proven, or unproven, but realistic ideas to approach the strategy of finding ten clients in the same geographic area?

The Response

One idea might be to contact an executive relocation service. There are executives that are away from home for extended time periods. They stay in apartments specifically set up for them and may eat out frequently because there is no one to cook for them or they do not have the time or interest in doing so. Perhaps you might find apartments that these executives rent. Surely this would be a potential market for your services.

Another suggestion is to talk to property managers of upscale condos. Offer them a week's free service in exchange for the opportunity to post your brochures with a sample weekly-menu in the buildings. If they have a building newsletter, see if you can place a sample menu and brief ad in it. And why stop there? See if there is a neighborhood newspaper you could advertise in. These ads are usually fairly inexpensive, especially if the paper comes out once a week to 10,000 subscribers in a Chicago-like neighborhood. We all know the importance of getting the business out there in front of people on a consistent basis.

A personal chef in Tucson, Arizona approached a property manager who became very excited about the service. A gentleman renting from the manager had explained how he used a personal chef and how wonderful the service was. The manager asked for 30 brochures and so that he could put them in *welcome packets* that go out to all new tenants.



The Real World

Gift Basket With Alcohol

The Situation

You are thinking about selling gourmet gift baskets for the holidays. You would like to include an assortment of gourmet cheese, dips, fancy crackers, etc. To make the gift more special, you would also like to include a bottle of wine from your local winery and are tossing around the idea of having the bottle engraved.

The Question

Is it lawful to purchase spirits and then package it into a gift basket for resale?

The Response

A personal chef who previously worked for the Kansas Alcoholic Beverage Control Department had to address this question, or one similar to it, quite frequently. She found that a national marketing company had done research and compared the laws in all 50 states.

According to that research, there was no state that would allow you to do this. Regardless of how you come into possession of it, there is no way around the fact that you are selling alcohol - and that requires a license in all 50 states.

One way that alcohol could be included in baskets is if you are selling your baskets to someone who is in turn going to give them away to someone else. Your customer could then purchase the alcohol and bring it to you for inclusion in the basket, but you cannot purchase it yourself and be reimbursed. This is an area all personal chefs should be careful about with their business. You cannot legally provide wine or any other alcoholic beverage as any part of a personal chef service because then your service turns into retailing liquor, which requires a license.

So, in summary:

No person may directly or indirectly, on any pretense, sell, barter, charge for possession or otherwise dispose of alcoholic beverages as part of a commercial transaction without having obtained the proper license or permit.

Food Theme Cards

The Situation

If you are like many personal chefs, you probably send Thanksgiving and Christmas cards to clients as a token of appreciation for their patronage. And like many other personal chefs, you may have found a company that sells some really great cards, perfect for thanking clients for their business and wishing them well in the New Year. Like others, however, when the next holiday season rolls around you may have been disappointed to learn that the card company you've been using has gone out of business.



The Real World

The Question

What are some ideas for creating a personalized or food-themed card for the holidays?

The Response

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of card sources to research on the Internet, yet it is often difficult to find a food theme, or any theme, that fits your personality. Sometimes the card is right, but the price is wrong or vice versa. Here are a few inexpensive ideas that will dress up the cards you do have, or help you create your own personalized cards. Purchase handmade or specialty paper to print your own message and insert into a card. Pressed floral, leaf impression, batik, crinkle, vellum, or leather papers really change the feel, look and mood of a message.

Frequently, during the holidays, you can find envelopes with a themed border. If not, you will certainly find great ideas for borders at a stamp shop. You could apply the stamp, using your imagination, and changing color, repetition, and texture.

Purchase specialty papers and envelopes early in the season since seasonal items disappear quickly. You may be able to save quite a bit by purchasing what is left over after the holidays and have a jump start on next year. For an additional touch, pick up some food-themed stickers and store them where you would write your thank you notes.

Is Your Website Getting Attention?

The Situation

You are in the process of designing a website for your business. You have looked at several websites for inspiration and ideas, but now you realize you have no idea how to actually go about creating an effective one. In fact, up to this point, you have been operating on assumptions and personal preferences about what makes a good website.

The Question

How do you know if your website is effective?

The Response

If you build it, they will come. To your company's website, that is. There are a number of important questions to ask your website designer as you proceed with your design. For example, how will you know:

- ❖ How many visitors you have?
- ❖ Which pages attract customers?
- ❖ Which pages are wasted because customers ignore them?
- ❖ In other words, how do you find out if your web investment is worthwhile and helps advance your strategic goals?



The Real World

Fortunately, a number of services can help you analyze your online traffic - in effect, count heads. Costs range from hundreds of dollars to thousands and many are "free." Which one is right for you will depend largely on the complexity of your website.

Nine Tips For Making Your Web Site More Powerful

Tip #1 Do not make your website look like a brochure

Telling people what you do is not going to engage them. Instead you want to tell them what the results are of working with you. This is the place to use lots of benefits and solution-oriented language!

Tip #2 Give away free information

The key purpose of your website is to build trust and credibility. Giving people the opportunity to experience what you do is the easiest, fastest way to build trust quickly. Giving away information can be in the form of a free article, a checklist, an assessment, electronic magazine, etc.

Tip #3 Ask questions

Start your website by asking your reader a question. Sprinkle questions throughout your website to keep people engaged and interested. This will also help you keep the site focused on the reader and not on you. Remember this principle: It's Not About You, It's About Them.

Tip #4 Keep paragraphs short

Three to four sentences per paragraph are plenty! You want to create "white space" and a clean, uncluttered look. People will not read copious amounts of text, especially on your home page until you get them interested.

Tip #5 Make certain the site loads quickly!

People are too impatient to wait while your site loads the most stunning graphics imaginable. Instead, keep the logos and graphics simple and fast to load so your reader will stay on your site instead of leaving it.

Tip #6 Do not use frames, flashing do-dads, or require your visitor to download software just to view the site.

A website is not a carnival ride. Plus, most readers will not take the time to download special software just to view your site. You do not need special contraptions to capture attention. Just follow these tips!

Tip #7 Include testimonials

Testimonials are a powerful way to build credibility and trust quickly. DO NOT be shy about using them throughout your site. Plus you can enjoy reading the nice things people say about you, also.



The Real World

Tip #8 Do not wait to have a website.

Even a simple home page that asks engaging questions, includes a free article and has just two testimonials, is better than waiting until you design what you ultimately want. Do not underestimate the power of having your own site!

Tip #9 Hire someone to help you write the copy!

Writing good copy that engages the reader is a skill and an art. Are you an experienced copywriter? Are you able to write comfortably about your own business using strong, benefits-oriented language? If your answer is "no", then save yourself a lot of time and frustration by hiring a professional!

More Tips For Making Your Website More Powerful A website gives you a way to tell more about yourself and your service than you ever could in a brochure. Not only that, you share your information with folks at a time when it's most convenient for them and when they're most interested.

You Have Nothing to Hide

First things first: Your home page must contain your company's name and contact information including a phone number. So obvious it's laughable, right? You'd think so, but you would be surprised at how many sites make visitors search through multiple pages to find any contact information.

Get to the Point

Your website must explain exactly what it is you do - clearly and concisely. Telling people how you do things will not engage them. Instead you want to tell them the how your service will help them. When a visitor reads your information, they are always thinking, "What do I get out of it?" You can list the features of your service, but you cannot focus on them.

Make it Personal

Great websites are neat, clear and concise, and they're also personal. All you have to do is remember that you are addressing human beings. Engage your visitors simply and directly. Design headings with an understanding of the type of information your customers need and the language in which they formulate questions.

Whither Should I Go?

Visitors need to know how to get around from page to page. When it comes to website navigation, cleanliness truly is next to godliness. Also, make sure that every one of your subsequent web pages has a link back to your main home page.



The Real World

Tooting Your Horn

Post letters from clients that testify about how wonderful you are and how they “can’t imagine how they ever did without a personal chef.” Testimonials are a powerful way to build credibility. Use them. If you don’t have any to use, ask each of your clients to write one for you.

Soup

The Situation

You can assume that if a client wants a soup as an entrée, then you would charge a basic service fee. But, soups are usually labor and time intensive. Also, how many sides do you usually include using the five entrée, four serving formula?

The Question

What should you charge a client for soup as an entrée? How much do you charge if it is an extra?

The Response

If you estimate how many hours it will take you to prepare the soup, you could charge an hourly rate plus groceries. Some personal chefs will price soup separately as an add-on. For example, you might charge \$5 for single portions or \$9 per quart (for most soups), and \$12 per quart for something like Seafood Chowder (stews are generally considered an entrée and priced as such). When you are serving soup as an entrée, provide a substantial portion, perhaps a bit under a half gallon for two people. This is because the dollar amount for soup may seem rather pricey to a client; however, the extra amount of soup can be used for the client’s lunch menus as well, making the soup more cost effective.

Add a healthy portion of salad (with fruit in it) and bread and you can easily consider this as one of five entrées. As an example, one personal chef prepared a Roasted Garlic Potato Soup, Pear Salad and Ranch Garlic Bread. Other personal chefs have said that they routinely double soup recipes as soup recipes for four never seem to be enough, especially if it is going to be used as an entrée. They don’t charge extra for this. They feel that soups are easy to make and do not take extra time since they can be simmering while other dishes are being prepared.

Special Diets

The Situation

A woman you work for has joined Weight Watchers and would like you to prepare Weight Watchers’ recipes. She has marked several recipes in a magazine, too many to count, and has tried to convince you to use some of her old freezer-burned chicken in order to discount the package price. After having briefly reviewed the recipes, you have mixed feelings about the quality of some of them, not to mention their freeze-ability. What it boils down to is that it takes you quite a bit more time to re-design your menus for this client and you don’t quite know how to charge for it.



The Real World

Moreover, a similar situation has you working with a personal trainer. The client needs to eat six carefully measured meals a day. He does not have recipes, but rather "acceptable" food lists such as boneless, skinless chicken; turkey; brown rice; etc. He has not yet let you see exactly what his meal plans are but has mentioned that he wants his chicken purchased from a particular market (which, incidentally, doesn't generally open until 9:00 AM).

The Question

How should you price meal packages for special diets? How do you factor in pricing for extensive measuring and portion control?

The Response

You should buy and use the fresh products from the grocery. Your reputation as a personal chef is at stake! For either client, don't make a price decision until you review their diets. If it's just lean cuts of meats, brown rice and vegetables, you may be able to keep your prices the same. Your pricing should not change unless the client wants organic foods or gourmet or eccentric items. For example, you would increase your price for kosher markets (which are typically very expensive). A kosher diet will take you longer to cook because you have to be aware of the kosher and non-kosher items in the kitchen. So if everything (from shopping, traveling, preparing, etc.) takes you twice as long, then you could double your price (or raise your price by a third, fourth, eighth, or whatever the increase of your standard costs are).

As far as acquiring chicken from a particular market goes, the price of the chicken should be reflected in your costs the same as any other specialty grocery item would be. If the cost is beyond what you include in your standard service, you would want to increase your price accordingly for the specialty ingredients and increased costs for extra mileage, if appropriate.

It may take you longer initially to prepare the first menus for a special diet but, with experience, it will go faster. One thing to think about is that the portion size is usually smaller for Weight Watcher clients so your food costs may be lower.

As far as what to charge for measuring foods, why would this be an extra charge if you were already measuring in regards to recipes and servings? The point is, whether a client is on a portion control diet or not, you are still measuring for adequate servings. It doesn't make any difference if the servings are smaller or larger. If the presentation is adding time to your service, or the amount of food prepared is adding cost to your service, then charge accordingly. However, be careful about justifying additional charges for services you are already providing as a part of your standard service.



The Real World

Remember – this is your business and you must run it in a way that makes you proud. When a client insists that you use her freezer-burned chicken or tries to direct your business, you have to remind him or her that these are your standards and that you were hired because they liked what they learned about your service. If you allow a client to dictate what your business ought to be, pretty soon you may find yourself behaving not as your own boss, but as an employee. You can be flexible in certain areas, but not with standards, self-image, high quality, and self-respect. Your reputation and ethics need to remain high. Consequently, if a client wants entrées to be based on their recipes (such as Weight Watchers or any other source) until you test the recipes, you shouldn't guarantee how they will taste, freeze, or re-heat. You might suggest trying their recipes one at a time as opposed to using them all on one menu. This way, adjustments may be made and their very personalized menu can be successfully developed.

I Broke The Garbage Disposal!

The Situation

Help! You have managed to leave a metal measuring spoon in the disposal without knowing about it, and, of course, the disposal tried to crush the spoon and broke.

To make matters worse, this is a one-time client who you were hoping would become a once-a-month client (at least that was beginning to be established during the food survey/menu planning stage, until you went and broke their appliance).

You immediately told them that you would pay for any necessary repairs or replacement in full, but you are afraid that this accident has ruined any possibility of them becoming long-term clients.

The Question

Would it help if you brought a food "peace offering" when you go to the client's house with a reimbursement check to replace or repair the garbage disposal? Or is that meager?

The Response

For safety's sake, do not use any equipment that belongs to the client, except the sink, stove, oven, refrigerator and freezer. Also, remember to take all your garbage out with you when you are done for the day.

Peace offerings are never meager. Presenting food to demonstrate your sincere apologies is nothing to scoff at and will most likely be more appreciated than you know.

As far as the disposal, conveniently enough, good disposals are pretty tough units. First try to get the spoon parts out of the disposal. Typically, there is a tool attached which allows for the motor to be turned backwards in order to un-jam it. Try this first, then, press the reset button on the motor. If this fails, then think about buying the client a new one. Because of this frequent scenario, most personal chefs do not use the client's disposal, but instead bag the scraps and throw them away.



The Real World

Fortunately, most people understand that these things happen in the course of living, and do not allow accidents like this to make or break a future relationship. Since this client is not a long-term client yet, perhaps offering a discounted amount for their next service (i.e., the cost of repairing or replacing the disposal) will encourage them to sign on. They will surely appreciate the gesture and it will give them another opportunity to fall in love with your food.

I'm Sick

The Situation

It is your first winter season as a personal chef. It is this season that you, like most people, get a cold. You don't typically require bed rest, but wonder if you should continue to cook for your clients.

The Question

Do you cook for your clients, despite being sick?

The Response

Don't go to work if you're not feeling well. If you're sick, you may transmit diseases to food - and then to other people. Anyone experiencing diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, fever, or sore throat with fever should be kept away from food preparation.

For colds, it would probably be best to call your clients and tell them that you have a cold. Ask if they would be comfortable with you coming to their home to cook (armed with gloves and mask) or not. Surprisingly, many clients still want their personal chef to come and cook. They feel confident you will continue to use safe food handling and sanitation techniques.

Safe handling and sanitation techniques mean being meticulous about washing your hands and leaving the room if you feel the urge to cough or sneeze. There have been very few complaints from clients related to catching a cold from a personal chef; however, chefs themselves have complained about being very tired. Common sense will tell you if you need to stay home and rest instead of cook.

On the other side of the coin, you may get a call from a client requesting you cook for someone in the household who is sick. One particular personal chef accepted such a request. When she arrived, the sick husband was in bed. Later on that day he came out of his room, but he stayed in another room and only spoke briefly to her. The personal chef made soup that day (the aromas will make anyone feel better!) and suggested the ill husband have some. The personal chef did not get sick, even after the same thing happened several weeks later when the wife became ill. The personal chef appreciated the call from her clients and was especially careful with washing, disinfecting equipment, and practicing other safe food handling and sanitation techniques.



The Real World

The Client Is Bereaved!

The Situation

A regular client of yours, a retired physician, recently purchased a gift certificate. The certificate was for a fellow retired physician, your client's former partner. The gift was actually from all of the partners in their firm and the reason for the certificate was to help the physician's partner while his wife was hospitalized and after her release. However, when the time came for an appointment to develop a menu and schedule a cooking date, the husband postponed the appointment as his wife was once again hospitalized. He indicated she would be released to a rehab center and that he would follow up with you upon her arrival home. Unfortunately, the day came when, instead of her homecoming, you saw the wife's obituary in the daily paper.

Of course, you respect the mourning process and plan to not do anything in the immediate future.

The Question

How should you handle this? Who should you call? Your regular client who purchased the gift certificate or the gift recipient? And after what duration is it appropriate to contact either of them?

The Response

Because of all the emotions and uncertainties, the husband may be dealing with, along with having to make funeral arrangements and see to other obligations, it may be best to call your client who initially purchased the gift certificate. Ask him to communicate with the certificate recipient at a later, more appropriate time. A generous offer you might consider making is to cook a meal for friends and family of the bereaved husband.

Also, contacting the person who purchased the gift certificate and offering to cook for his former partner may increase your credibility as you demonstrate your concern, sincerity, and understanding. Sending a note of condolence would be a simple and appropriate gesture as well.

Other personal chefs in this predicament waited a week before contacting the gift certificate (or service) recipient to see if they were still interested in the service or not. Of course, if they were not interested, the person issuing the gift certificate would be refunded.

The Client's Oven Is Broken!

The Situation

You are going to provide a personal chef service for a dinner party on New Year's Eve. The dinner is for 14 people and you just found out that the client's oven is broken. You think quickly and put the meat on a gas grill. The salad is not a problem. But the side dish is scalloped potatoes!

The Question

Can scalloped potatoes be made on a gas grill? And, if you decide you have no choice but to make them ahead, what would be the best way to reheat them without drying them out or burning the bottom? Should advance preparation and re-heating even be considered?



The Real World

The Response

Make sure all appliances are in working order prior to the party!

Here are some choices you might think about:

- ❖ Use the microwave.
- ❖ Reheat over steam in a chafing dish.
- ❖ Cook or reheat using the burners on the stove.
- ❖ Cook or reheat on a gas grill

You might think that making the potatoes ahead in your own kitchen and then taking them out of the oven right before you leave is a good solution. It is a solution, but not a good one. All municipalities have laws and regulations that state, in one way or another, that cooking out of your home kitchen for business purposes is illegal. Even if it's a dire situation, it doesn't make it O.K. Plus, your personal chef liability insurance does not provide coverage in this instance. This legal issue can obviously cause problems for your business.

Avoid the temptation to prepare food in your own home. Also avoid the temptation to use a neighbor's oven. Instead, take all aspects into consideration before you make your decision. For example, use the microwave or other burners if available, to precook the potatoes to a point where they are beginning to soften. Then assemble the dish and finish cooking it on the gas grill.

Other options would be to see if there is a commercial kitchen available. Or ask if the client can have their own oven fixed. If none of these options are possible, then consider changing the side dish to something that does not need to bake in an oven such as garlic mashed potatoes topped with cheese. Advice well worth repeating is to consider all of your options before making any decisions.

The Client Doesn't Like The Side Dish!

The Situation

You are a new chef and have a client that you have cooked for on three different occasions. After cooking for him, you called a few days later to see if everything was satisfactory. The last time you called, he had no complaints and everything was fine. But when you called again to schedule another cooking day, he said he didn't like two of the side dishes. He said he ate them, but he didn't want them again. Each time you have cooked for him you have told him that you will replace anything that he cannot eat.

The Question

Since the client ate the sides and was not mad, yet at the same time wasn't thrilled, what would you do to mend the problem? Should you cook some extra side dishes for him at his next service? Or should you prepare an extra entrée that he loves? Or should you just leave it alone and make sure you do not make those particular side dishes again?



The Real World

The Response

Most personal chefs would agree to just “leave it alone” and not prepare those particular side dishes again. The dishes themselves were not poorly prepared, in fact, they were edible; the client simply did not care for them. Making a little extra food for the client next time you provide your service will demonstrate your goodwill. A nice, big salad, for example, or vegetables and dip, or maybe even brownies may do the trick in re-satisfying the client. However, beware of being this generous too often as some clients may take advantage.

Not being able to satisfy a client every single time happens sometimes. It is a fact of being a personal chef. So try not to overly criticize yourself, or doubt your skills too severely. This situation does re-emphasize the importance of using some method for receiving feedback. This is a big factor in client retention. The purpose of asking the clients to give you feedback is so you can better target what they will love. Make notations in a folder, keeping track of what you've cooked for specific clients and which entrées or side dishes were “disapproved.”

A spreadsheet that lists all items made for clients, a service number, date of service, and notes regarding whether the food was liked or disliked, is one option for tracking client satisfaction.

Additionally, likes and dislikes of particular dishes - be it entrées, side dishes, desserts, certain spices, textures, or a combination - could be determined by using a “Taste Test” survey sheet. One personal chef found this survey to be a clever way to check the client's satisfaction. This personal chef includes a survey with each service. The client can then rate how they liked or disliked each dish. The survey provides great feedback regarding which foods (or combinations) to repeat and which to avoid. Of course, spending time at the in-home interview focusing on preferences and specifics will help diminish problems later. As most personal chefs discern with time, sometimes the people who “can eat anything” wind up being somewhat restrictive. Collecting and using feedback is an invaluable skill to master in fine-tuning your service.

The Pressware© Caught On Fire!

The Situation

A client has reported to you that a container heated in their oven caught on fire! The reheat instructions were 375 degrees for 40-50 minutes.

The Question

Was the temperature setting too high or the cooking time too long for re-heating Pressware©?

The Response

The upper end of temperature for Pressware© is 400 degrees. So it could be assumed that it is the oven that has malfunctioned and heated the Pressware© to 400 degrees or above. This is a situation that illustrates the importance of checking the accuracy of your client's appliances regularly since the calibration of the oven can change. Testing the appliances with a thermometer throughout the course of your service is highly recommended. Things can break or malfunction and wreak havoc.



The Real World

If the oven temperature is off kilter, you may be able to adjust the heating instructions to include initial re-heating in a microwave oven, then placing the food in the oven at 350 degrees instead of 375 degrees. Or, you may want to have the client re-heat the food at 350 degrees for a longer period of time.

Pressware© needs to be filled with a fair amount of food in order to withstand the temperature of 400 degrees for one hour or less. Be sure to clearly understand the proper use, and limitations, of the container you decide to use for your service. In addition to the proper use of containers, use a thermometer the next time you provide your service for this client and test the oven. Inform the client of any adjustments in re-heating that may need to be made.

Accommodating Children

Personal chefs know the challenge children sometimes pose with regards to "client satisfaction." Several personal chefs have had to adjust their pricing strategies, apply menu-splitting strategies, or prepare special recipes, in order to accommodate the children in the family. Many personal chefs have their own philosophies about family dinner time, such as "if you're hungry, you'll eat what's offered," But many also question, "at what age do you see children eating what mom and dad are eating?" What standard entrées are a favorite for the whole family - grown-ups and kids alike? What if the child wants to eat healthier foods than mom or dad? And then there's the whole issue of menu planning and pricing. Here are various responses to these types of questions that may help you determine strategies for your own personal chef service business.

The Situation

You cook for a family with four children ranging in ages from one month, seventeen months, three years, and four years old. You charge \$350 for the standard service for two adults. The four year old doesn't eat anything, and the seventeen month old and three year old eat everything!

The Question

How do you plan your menu to accommodate the family?

The Response

One suggestion is to make up a menu for the two adults, as usual, then, throw in two "extra" recipes placed into very small freezer containers for the kids (the two portions would equal one adult portion). This way, if the children refuse to eat the grown up food, the parents still have something (a "back up" recipe more preferable to the children) to give them to eat. The "kid" food (four cheese macaroni and cheese, for example) is just for back up. So pricing at the high end, cooking for the adults while providing "back up" meals for the children, may work very well. Some kids are very picky and may eat noodles off mom's plate, but not touch the entrée. Every family is different, so you have to look at each one and base your costs off their needs.



The Real World

Some parents look at your service as an opportunity for their kids to try new foods. However, kids typically do not get too adventuresome. You may want to prepare some dishes from kid-friendly recipes, as well as try others that are more eccentric (in the eyes of a child, that is). Most anything presented in a fun way, such as cutting things with cookie cutters, will help the kids feel they're getting an extra special treat. You can also leave a treat for the kids. Many clients have expressed how the children really look forward to each service when they discover a sweet left just for them.

Patience, too, is essential. It will take time for the children to adjust to the new tastes and food presentation. As with any of your clients, you will need to receive some feedback before you will know how the menus work for the whole family.

Interviewing the children, finding out their favorites, will aid you in satisfying everyone. Then you can take those key food items and introduce them in new ways. For example, if a child loves cheese, ham, carrots or celery, and pasta, then use these ingredients in various dishes such as a macaroni and cheese dish, casserole, or soup. Most likely the entrée will receive a positive response. Some personal chefs have found that a lot of kids like good ole comfort foods. They also like Italian and Mexican dishes. Many children don't like garlic, blue cheese or spicy dishes, but will eat small foods and soft foods such as mashed potatoes, chicken and turkey cut into bite size pieces, and sweetened vegetables (even tofu if it's in the shape of nuggets). Your adult clients may know what and how much food to order to supplement what they feed their children.

One personal chef has figured out a "standard equation" for figuring how to price menus and it seems to work well for her. For example, if a child will eat a whole chicken breast in one sitting, then the menu plan will include a full portion for the child and is charged accordingly. If only half a chicken breast will be eaten, then this chef adjusts her pricing accordingly (i.e., by half or by a quarter, etc.). You could also prepare and charge for a full portion if two small children can split an entrée. That is to say, take away one of the five standard entrées and make small, kid-friendly dishes (say two or three) for the same price as an adult entrée. (One small child will most likely share mom and dad's meals, and therefore, will not require an added fee.) For older children, such as a growing boy of 17 years of age, double portions may be appropriate just for him. Being flexible is the most important thing. After all it's a personalized service. People really appreciate that.

A Dinner Party

The Situation

You have a party scheduled in two weeks. It has a Greek theme, which is great for the adults. But there will be about 10 children and your client wants to have something more child friendly and easy - no messes.

The Question

What on earth should you make?



The Real World

The Response

Try peanut butter and jelly roll ups - with trimmed crusts. Two through six year olds love them, as do the parents. The same holds true with ham and cheese rolled in a tortilla and sliced to make pinwheels. Or perhaps, in order to fit with the Greek theme a little better, you could make chicken fingers. Cheese tortellini in a simple pesto sauce and served on skewer are generally hits as well. Also make skewered fruit with melons, strawberries, and bananas. As long as the kids are not too young (under four) and supervised, the skewers shouldn't pose a threat, and they are simple to prepare.

Hide The Veggies!

The Situation

Two of the three children of a family of five do not like vegetables and refuse to eat them. The mother, obviously, wants them to have a balanced diet.

The Question

How can you accommodate the parents who want their children to eat a balanced meal and accommodate the children? After all, we all know the trauma of being forced to eat (insert any food you do not like) and stay at the table until our plate was clean!

The Response

Hide the vegetables. Veggies can be hidden in a number of foods. Take meatloaf, for example, or stuffed manicotti. If you hide vegetables in an entrée, you may be asking yourself, "How many vegetables can I hide in a serving?"

You can hide more of the vegetables that have a mild flavor, such as carrots or zucchini, as well as vegetables that have less color, such as, onion, cucumber, jicama, or celery. You can hide most any vegetable if it is pureed. Use the pureed vegetables as a base for scalloped potatoes, casseroles, soups, sauces, stews, etc. Or include a juice beverage, shake, or smoothie with the dinner.

KNIVES

Knives are the most essential tools for a personal chef, or anyone cooking for that matter. And yet they are often the least understood tools in the kitchen. Once you've tried your first good knife, you'll understand how it can transform cooking from drudgery into joy. The key is not just in the selection, but also in the proper and safe use of your knives. Remember that, as with any technique, it's all about practice.

Difference Between Stamped And Forged Knives?

Forged and stamped are two different manufacturing processes used to make a knife.



The Real World

Stamped

Stamped blades are punched out from a thin ribbon of steel, much like dough cut by a cookie cutter. The blades are tempered, sharpened, and finished, but machines handle most of the process. The blade of a stamped knife is fitted into its handle and is not considered one fluid piece of equipment. They are usually thinner, lighter and lack the balance of forged knives; therefore, they require a firmer grip and more pressure when chopping, mincing, etc. They are usually priced lower than forged cutlery.

Forged

This is the top of the line in quality. It's one of the oldest methods of construction using hand craftsmanship and produces the strongest and sharpest blade. Forged knives are produced when a steel bar is heated to a very high temperature, set into a die and hammered to form the blade. It is then tempered, sharpened, and finished, sometimes in up to 50 separate steps, most of which are done by hand. Forged knives will always include a bolster and a tang. A bolster is the center support piece between the blade and the handle. This adds weight and balance to the knife and protection for your fingers. The tang is the portion of the metal enclosed by the handle. A full tang is ideal, which means the metal runs the length of the handle. Knives which are "fully forged" are formed from one piece of metal.