



Must Today's Chef Address the Growing "Family" Dynamic?

You betcha!

937 words (some itals)

By Chef Whitney, CEC

Most clubs changing demographics will require a club chef's quick response to the needs of the growing "families with young children."

Now more than ever, the chef must consider families with children in all decision making and in the basic skill areas required of the "super chef" (i.e., hospitality personality, technology and outreach ability).

These are the foremost issues in family dining success for any club chef. However, there are a few outside issues that affect the chef's success in which management must also agree. Firstly, separate but equal dining spaces. For example, if your bar doesn't allow children, have a second area, with a TV and a similar "bar" atmosphere for the families with children. Secondly, kid friendly dress code for the formal dining room. In other words, would a child be exempted from the tie requirement? And thirdly, a "bistro" dining area for families, which allow for some "kid mistakes." This allows the children to dine with their parents in a restaurant atmosphere, while enabling the parents to teach their children table etiquette without obvious stares and whispers.

Hospitality personality

A club chef must treat families dining with children with the same reverence given other diners. Stress the importance to the wait staff of talking directly to the child when taking dinner orders. Instruct the waiters to converse with the child, and then politely look to the adult for the final order. When roaming the club and talking with families with young children ask, "what are some home favorites?"

Try different dishes on menus and buffets or hold a kid's food contest for kids only. Prepare special requests from a seven year old with equal enthusiasm as you would from a 30-year member. By bringing the kids into the menu process and acting on requests with equal importance, you validate a child's existence. This is the right attitude for a club chef to succeed in taking care of families'

needs and also an important role in a chef's longevity because these children are your future *board of directors!*

Technology

The biggest challenge is to offer nutritional meals, low in fat content that can compete with fast food options that children are drawn to. The last 20 years has been "the decline of the western kid's eating habits." I was talking with a mother at the club and her guest mentioned her son had been diagnosed with high cholesterol at the age of 6.

The most positive approach is to have simple dishes that are kid-friendly and prepared in-house. Also, a healthy alternative is to bake instead of fry. A popular BC kid's dish is chicken pieces breaded in ground up cheese flavored goldfish crackers. The kids eat the goldfish crackers as a snack (available gratis at the bar). I call the chicken dish "goldfish chicken" and any cracker will work. If you have a tasty bar cracker that is a hit with your club's kids try it out.

Some other favorites are spaghetti carbonara (bacon is sure to make any dish kid friendly), potato chip breaded and baked chicken, cheesy goldfish crackers breaded and baked chicken, tempura shrimp with ketchup sauce, beef dip sandwiches or steak sandwiches. You can find these ideas and more at clubculinary.com.

Use Real Ingredients and Make Real Dishes

If you put pizza on the kid's menu then make a fresh personal size crispy homemade pizza. For kids' buffets try a bunch of 10-inch pizzas, made ahead of time, to reheat and serve on pizza trays under a heat lamp. This method may be more successful than using the processed type, like frozen bagel bites, pockets, etc. and is certainly better for the kids' health because the chef can control the ingredients!

Outreach Ability

The club chef must address children's issues in the same manner adult issues are addressed. For example, I had a sauce for my filet that was a little sweet and sour because it started with caramelized shallots, sugar and vinegar. I changed the recipe to a simple red wine sauce. Shortly thereafter, as I was visiting with tables, I discovered that an eight-year old was displeased with the change. He admitted, as did his parents happy to have found a great source of protein for their child, that he had grown accustomed to the former filet dish and ordered it every time, about three nights a week. I told him we could re-create the sauce with the caramelized onions. He replied, "I don't like onions, the sauce I liked didn't have onions." The natural response, especially considering his age, would be to correct the child about the ingredients of the recipe. Obviously, he didn't know his favorite sauce was prepared with onions. Instead, I simply told him that he may ask me for the sauce at any time and that he may even see a comeback shortly.

The club chef must reach out to all age groups. They must embrace the most un-embraceable and take care of the wants and needs of everyone with equal regard. This is why a club must have or cultivate a “super chef.”

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