

The Soul of a Club Chef

2003

**Gregg Patterson, General Manager
The Beach Club**

Having Soul:

I have a great club chef. "Great" has to do with something more than the food Whitney cooks (which is outstanding) or the business he generates (more "seats in seats" every year). What sets Whitney apart in a world filled with cooks and "culinary commodities" is the soul of a club chef. He's got heart. He's in the happiness business. He's a club chef.

Getting Soul:

To be good at what they do, a chef needs technical mastery and business acumen---they need to cook and count. But to be a great at what they do, a club chef needs "soul." Those with soul are passionately committed to the happiness of their members. They get a buzz when people smile after munching down kitchen creations, from corn dogs to fusion cuisine. They glow when they see smiles and feel "the love." Soul is the "value added" part of a club's culinary adventure, the warm embrace that makes the club experience special.

Soul is driven by personality. Personalities build relationships. Relationships weld club communities together. Food becomes a symbol for soul. To be great, a club chef needs to touch their diners with the culinary embrace and to give each member "well rounded happiness"---great food seasoned with soul. Twenty-first century managers and directors needs to look at "Chef Metrics"---the measures used to establish success or failure as a club chef--- a little differently. The culinary metrics of a given club tell outsiders a lot about the club culture. "Soul food metrics" need to be factored into the culinary equation.

To measure "right" you need to ask the right questions. You are what you do and what you do can be measured. Great club chefs do what they do a little differently. Their practices address the people side of the culinary adventure. Soul has to do with "managing constituencies"---handling the people end of the business and addressing the broadest possible spectrum of the member community. Kids at the kids buffet are as

important to club chefs as the aging geezer eating nightly in the dining room. Chef behaviors can be observed, explained, quantified, measured.

People grow toward “the good” whenever “success behaviors” are identified, emphasized and measured. Examine the following culinary metrics and determine which ones work in your club culture. Measure the measurable. See if your chef has the soul of a club chef.

Lobby Greeter: How often has the chef assisted the General Manager in welcoming members and their guests on big dinner nights? (I assume that the General Manager makes a habit of greeting member diners in the lobby!)

Coat Checker: How many times has the chef stood in the lobby with the management team to check member coats during the holiday season?

Table Encounters: How many tables did the chef visit during dinner in each of the dining rooms?

Broad Spectrum Member Contacts: How many member age groups did the chef talk to during the evening?

Dramatizing their Food Passion: How frequently does the chef “talk with their hands” when describing the new winter squash they’ve just received from farmer Joe? How frequently do they address “the buzz, the love and the glow” when describing a plate of food?

Calls to New Members: How many new members did the chef personally call to welcome into the Club?

Number of member names known: How many members did the chef call by name when meeting them in the lobby or at their table?

Comfort level with members: How many members have insisted that the chef address them by their first name when speaking?

Number of members making unplanned visits to the kitchen: How many members simply walked into the kitchen to “shoot the breeze” with the chef?

Number of “Taste This” Walk-Abouts in the Clubhouse: How many times did the chef put samples of their newest creations on a platter and walk them through the clubhouse for members to experience?

Passing Hors d’oeuvres: How many times did the chef walk hors d’oeuvres through the clubhouse during the cocktail hour?

Number of “specials” prepared after “working the tables” on a given evening: How many “off menu specials” did the chef suggest and then take orders for during their walk-about in the clubhouse?

Articulating to the Articulate: How non-culinary conversations did the chef have with members during their walk-about?

There at the beginning: How many times did a host or hostess ask to have the chef sit in on their event planning session in the course of any given week?

The Amount of “New” Added to the Menu: How many “tweaks a week” did the chef do to the menu? How many times are major overhauls done to the menu each year?

Corn Dogs Served from the Kids Buffet: How often has the chef stood at the kids dinner buffet and served up kid food to the awe struck kids with their paper plates?

Giving to the next generation---external interns: How many intern apprentices from the local culinary academy were used in a given week?

Giving to the next generation---kids in the kitchen: How many member children were toured through the kitchen? How many cooking classes were given for member children?

Giving to the next generation---internal interns: How many “street people” with no culinary experience have been hired, are now being educated by the chef and are moving up through the culinary ranks?

Teaching and Preaching: How many seminars have been given to professional groups outside the club in a given year?

Club Sense---the number of trophies not shown or awards not worn: How many awards were won or degrees earned that weren’t seen by the members?

Articles Published: How many articles did the chef author in the club newsletter on in journals outside the club?

Calls to the disgruntled: How many times did the chef personally call those who had an off-color culinary experience?

Calls to the contented: How many times did the chef personally call those who wrote good thoughts to the manager about their culinary experience?

The Number of “doggie bags” prepared for those attending Big Event Dinners: How many “taste this at home” doggie bags did the chef make for member diners after doing their “walk-about” through the clubhouse?

“My Restaurant” thinking: How many times during the day did the chef allude to “their restaurant” when speaking of the club dining room?

Cultivating the “Idiosyncratic Personality”: How many different personality characteristics do members address when distinguishing your chef from others?

Food Demonstrations Given to Charity: How many culinary demonstrations has your chef conducted and how many speeches have they made to charities, social groups or member events at the club? How many times have members even asked that your chef demonstrate or pontificate to their charity of choice?

Classes taught in your club’s internal university: How many classes has your chef taught in your management team’s internal university?

Stories of the week told at the weekly senior staff meeting: How many “stories of the week” has your chef told to open up the weekly senior staff meeting?

“Beat the Chef” Tourneys: How many “beat the chef” golf-surf-tennis-volleyball tourneys are held at your club in any given year? And how many times did the chef laugh when they lost?

Finding Soul Food:

Every club wants to have a great club chef. Clubs need to define great when finding, directing and compensating the chef. Chefs need to be shown that “soul” can be measured and is as important to their club success as cooking and counting. Tell them what you’ll be measuring and the practices you’ll be looking for. Remind them that clubs are in the happiness business.

Few chefs will measure up. O.K. can be all right in a pinch. Accept that “you can’t squeeze orange juice from a turnip.” A handful of cooks can become executive chefs. Even fewer chefs have the right stuff to become club chefs. But knowing “the good” will make even a pedestrian club cook a little bit better.

Club food can be great if it’s got soul. Soul can be measured with a new set of culinary metrics. Measure the measurable and see how your club measures up.

Help your chef feel the buzz, the love and the glow. Amplify their soul.

Enjoy the culinary adventure-----