



Another Brick in the Wall

Despite Pink Floyd's famous lyrics, the hospitality industry definitely needs education (training). Stephen Billingham sheds some light on the various problems facing hospitality training in South Africa. Don't worry...he also has a few solutions.

Heighted media interest in the culinary profession, renewed public curiosity in the skills required by the industry and an increased demand for those skills brought about by our burgeoning tourism industry, have all resulted in a greater need for well-trained chefs than ever before. The general consensus within the industry is that there is more than sufficient culinary talent available (and even more yet to be discovered) in South Africa.

Unfortunately, the economic reality is that a large percentage of this talent will remain untapped. Hospitality training, whether on a technikon or private college level, is expensive and many South Africans either don't have the financial resources to enrol for tertiary education, or they don't qualify for entry.

This presents a problem for the future of our industry and something must rather be done than simply said. Chefs in management positions at hotels and restaurants throughout the country need to realise that they are expected to impart skills to their staff and embrace this role of being a responsible manager. They should constantly be on the lookout for real talent in their kitchens, relishing the prospect of locating such skills in the most unlikely of employees, and then nurturing his/her talent to its full potential.

There are many wonderful stories of dishwashers and cleaners who have gone on to become very successful chefs. I personally would love to hear more of such stories.

Various options are available to chefs and managers who wish to address the problem of training their staff and ultimately, assist them in working towards a qualification that will enable them to eventually fill management positions and beyond. I really

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programmes should be aligned to meet the required outcomes of a registered and recognised qualification in professional cookery.

The training begins when the employer selects an employed staff member showing potential as an aspiring chef, or employs a school-leaver wishing to enter the industry and signs him/her up onto the programme, before setting an annual training plan with them. The training provider should provide a workbook that contains all the paperwork, including activity logs that pertain to each course. The workbook covers all of the theoretical knowledge required. For example: tasks, projects, assignments and questions. It also helps the employer in supporting and validating the ongoing progress of the trainee by detailing the framework of the course to be completed in the workplace.

A unique aspect of this course is the "block release" programme, which the trainee will attend once annually during the three years of the course, for a period of six weeks per block. The purpose of this time away from the workplace

believe that the easiest way to get young chefs into the system is to take advantage of the numerous "apprentice in-service programmes" available to the industry.

To assist the hospitality industry with the development of its apprentice chefs who have not come through a training provider, these programmes were designed to assist young chefs in the advanced development of their culinary skills and the theoretical knowledge that is not normally available in the workplace. Ideally, these





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is to allow the trainee to cover theoretical subjects such as product knowledge, menu compilation, food costing, French cooking terminology, labour law and fundamental kitchen management skills in depth, as well as being exposed to demonstrations of certain practical aspects of culinary art.

Traditional theoretical exams are conducted upon completion of each block to ensure that knowledge has been retained. Once all of the required unit standards in the qualification have been completed, the trainee will be awarded with his/her certificate.

Another problem that chefs and managers are faced with when deciding on the best course of training for staff, as well as the sourcing of competent staff, is whether it is preferable to outsource training solutions or use in-house techniques. I reckon that - as with most things - advantages and disadvantages are associated with both options.

Outsourcing the training of apprentice chefs is certainly more costly than an in-house executive chef training his staff by himself. The external training provider will also be less familiar with the procedures and working conditions found in that particular kitchen. However, the fact that he/she is an outsider may help with credibility issues and a measure of authority can be perceived by the staff attending the programme.


Often, a training provider may be employed by a hotel or restaurant as a “quick-fix”, resulting in a training programme that is not as sustainable as the culture of knowledge transfer that can become entrenched in a well-established business. However, an in-house training programme may be perceived as unstructured by trainees and thus have less impact.



One of the biggest disadvantages of an in-house training programme is that the training provider - usually the executive chef or restaurant manager - is not a qualified teacher. It's unlikely that he/she possesses the time or skill to design training resources as effective as those provided by an external training provider. It's also quite possible that certain aspects of training will be neglected while others are over-emphasised. In my opinion, the best results are achieved when the two options are combined. The skills of the executive chefs and management are assets to their establishments and they should be utilised in conjunction with the professional teaching skills offered by external training providers.

While it may be easy for chefs and managers to utilise all resources available to them in the training of staff, it may take a bit more work to counteract another, more involved problem frequently faced by training providers and in-house trainers alike - illiteracy. Luckily for many in this industry, practical skill will set you apart from your colleagues, and this is something that chefs and managers need to know - especially if one of their staff members has the ability to go far but has no qualification.

There is no reason why an illiterate employee cannot aspire to a nationally recognised qualification. Testing can be done by means of oral examinations, as well as by observation, questioning, product sampling and simulation. All of which will provide the training provider with a clear indication of the apprentice's level of understanding.

This is extremely beneficial to the industry as it breaks down the entry barriers that may have prevented a talented chef from forging a rewarding career. Of course, illiteracy will eventually be a hurdle in any aspiring chef's career, particularly if he/she aspires towards a management position. Therefore, provision should be made to provide basic adult education to these employees so that they may be assisted in reaching their potential - something that will benefit not only the individual, but also the industry as a whole. 

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