

Kitchen Culture

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My kitchen is my home. The people I work with, over time, become my family. I think about the future of my staff, restaurant, and industry.

I am 36 years old. I have been working for myself for the past eight years seemingly without any break. I have run my own kitchen for six years and my own restaurant for close to four.

I am about to open two new restaurants. It is important for me to have an environment that I want to be in. This is where I spend all of my time and when I am not within the walls of my restaurants, I am thinking about what has happened and what is going to happen.

Since the opening of Elizabeth I have exponentially grown and evolved. In the beginning, having come from or working closely to kitchens that were a bit harsh, that is how I was. I could be mean-spirited, yell, become frustrated quickly. When it was my ass, name, livelihood on the line, yes, I was going to yell. But I found I was yelling because I did not know how to communicate effectively. Each day was a rat race to get things done, to even find our bearings. I have forgiven myself for this because for my first restaurant, my little small business where I run all departments, it was a lot. Most people might have been pulling out their hair too. However I

found that my lack of knowing how to communicate effectively was a direct result of my inability to organized myself. I could not stop to explain what I wanted or needed from my chefs because I was too busy trying to keep my own mind in order. I still have these days but today I have more insight on to be able to better address the situation rather than blow it up. I cannot speak for other chefs while I am certain each is exhausted. I do not know why we think this being harsh, crude, mean-spirited or yelling is effective. I have had a few employees where it worked but it was not sustainable. After a few days they were back to their same old selves and no amount of my push was going to get them to do things the way I needed them done. I have learned that I have to hire kids who want to learn, have their own sets of ambitions and driving forces. When I hire chefs I tell them I am not going to yell, while it is possible and I do, it is not the norm. I tell them I am not going to breathe down their neck. I tell them I will give them the tools to make food for Elizabeth and make it well. That we will work, learn, and grow together as a team. That I will present the standards I expect but I am not going to chase after them to hold them. If they do not I will know and they will not have a place in my home. It is very simple. The chefs who excel in my walls are chefs who are ambitious, can see the opportunities I am placing before them. They can see that Elizabeth is small enough that if they want to learn every possible thing they can.

Kitchens are always going to be full of seekers. It is an interesting breed of humans that are drawn to this industry, particularly the back of the house. We are wild, queer, nonconformist. The long hours keep us off the streets and out of trouble. It has been my mission to give my crew tools for the future no matter where they end up or what they do. They will learn how to care about what they are doing, not for me but for them. They will pay attention to the smallest of details. Be present. Act like adults. Be obedient. They will learn how to read attitudes and learn how to nurture the good ones. They will become teachers.

I do not know if this has any difference on whether it is a male's or a female's perspective. All I can say is: Elizabeth is my home and at times, these are my kids.