

detail what the ingredients are and how each dish is going to be prepared. If you do not, you will appear disorganized or amateurish to them when in fact you are supposed to be and sound like the expert. You will also need table setting skills, table waiting etiquette, wine and food pairing skills, and much more. This information will be covered in detail in this manual. But for now let's concentrate on the four keys.

Four Keys To Organization:

- ◆ Pre-designed dinner party menus
- ◆ A recipe collection
- ◆ A multi-purpose client agreement
- ◆ A standard equipment list

Pre-designed Dinner Party Menus

Pre-designed dinner party menus are set menus designed by you and printed for the purpose of showing to perspective clients. Having a variety of menus showing different styles and cuisines gives the potential client insight to your versatility. Pre-designed menus provide a starting point when talking with clients who are unsure of exactly what they want for a dinner party and will also help keep the client focused on the type of party you offer. Menus might take several days or more to set up, but they are the cornerstones to operating efficiently. When a client chooses one of your pre-designed menus, you already have a good idea what the groceries will cost, the time involved in preparation and how much potential profit you will also make.

Recipe Collection

Collecting recipes takes time and effort. It is important to organize your recipes systematically so that you can find recipes when a request is made for a dish. It doesn't matter whether you use a manual filing system or a computer program, the important thing is that you are able to find a recipe when you need it. Having a large pool of recipes to select from can simplify the task of designing creative menus or customizing a party for a special request.

Equipment List

An equipment list is pretty straightforward to put together. Once you have done it you'll likely never have to do it again. Make a list of absolutely every article that you will ever need to take to a client's house for a dinner party even down to matches, pens etc. A standard equipment list is included in the manual. You can start with this list and personalize it to fit your needs.

Organizing Your Dinner Party Business

To be profitable, you need to operate your business using the four keys with checklists as an organized system to track the tasks associated with your business. Checklists will help you keep on track and make sure that you are doing the things necessary to maintain the public perception that you are an organized professional in all aspects.

Printed Literature

Your literature does not need to be expensive, but it must represent you well. It may be the first introduction your potential clients have to your business. To the consumer, your literature is a reflection of your professionalism, quality and attention to detail. The types of clients that will use your service are

A dinner party can be purely social, business, professional, romantic or any combination. “Dinner” strongly suggests food will be available, and “Party” suggests a gathering where the company will be equally as important a factor. Fun is usually a word associated with a dinner party invitation also.

Objectives

For the host, the objective is to have a wonderful, turnkey evening or event where the guests are happy, enjoy themselves and enjoy a delightful memorable meal. For you, the dinner party expert, the objective is to satisfy the meal portion of this event, and earn a fair income for the time and efforts put forth. You actually have many objectives when conducting this type service. First, your primary objective is to have people know about you, your service, your quality and the benefits you offer. Once secured for an event, your mission should be to make life easy for the host by listening and understanding what they want, then offering your expert advice, when requested, on how to pull this all together. A host may have one or two elements somewhat in hand and definite, but there are always loose ends that they are uncertain of how to best coordinate or execute. For example, the host knows exactly what the menu will be, but has no clue on table settings, serving logistics or event timing. Others may have a great concept in their mind of a wonderful evening and food, but draw a complete blank when asked what’s for dinner! Your guidance and questions to learn more about this planned event will lead you to rationale, logical suggestions for whatever the missing elements are. Besides the aforementioned scenarios, one other is likely to surface now and then . . . the situation where a host has most of the puzzle pieces in order, but needs to find a way to reduce what could be a very large total expense. You’ll have tricks up your sleeve on how to offer the host and their guests what is requested with an eye on expenses and methods to control those costs.

Elements Of A Dinner Party

Need: Someone has a need for this type gathering. Ideally, your marketing will plant the seed for some potential clients, while others will have the need and simply need someone like you to help pull it off.

Venue: Typically the hosts home, but expect the unexpected. A romantic dinner for two, on a private beach at sunset is what dreams are often made of. Logistically, this can present more than a few problems.

Balance: A well planned menu will satisfy virtually everyone. Solid, open communication with your host should paint the picture for where you start your planning process and give good direction (3 course versus 7 course).

Settings: Outstanding food on a paper plate doesn’t exactly nail a good dinner party. Work with your host to identify areas where a little extra effort can make a world of difference. Sometimes this is as simple as renting a high quality plate setting for the event. The cost is minimal, and the visuals definitely make a statement as to the quality the guests are in for.

Execution: Time management skills need to be employed so that all plates and elements are ready on demand.

Outstanding food: This goes without saying. The perfect host, the ideal setting and all the fancy glasses in the world won’t overcome a substandard meal.

You, the chef: Each event will be a little different, but in most cases the host is more than happy to brag about the wonderful chef they’ve lined up for the evening. Be a partner with your host, but don’t steal their thunder. Be gracious, confident, personable and smile. Everyone wants to be friends with the chef, because everyone wants to think they know more about food and cooking than they actually do. A little small talk, a little inside description of what you’re preparing or how you made that look so wonderful can make all the difference.

PRICING A DINNER PARTY SERVICE

With your interest in providing dinner parties we assume you desire both “fun” and “profit” for your investment of time and energy. Because you are a foodie and have a passion for creating wonderful meals, you should, at a minimum, enjoy the meal creation process. If this part of the event turns you off, you may want to revisit your master plan. In business, “profit” is not a dirty word. You are not donating your time, unless you specifically state that you are. You are the expert in this field. You are the one who has the answers. You make it happen.

For the vast majority of services you are likely to encounter requests for, estimate that you’ll be earning \$40-\$60 per hour for your services. Variables are always present which will affect the final rate, but when all is said and done, your bottom line should remain relatively constant.

Using simple math, if a dinner party for 6 people brings you \$600 total, and your overhead is \$175, and your onsite time is 4 hours, you’ve just had fun making over \$100/hour. Sounds great, but when you factor in your pre-event planning time your realistic hourly rate becomes more like \$50. This example is ultra-simple, but the reality of conducting dinner parties is not terribly far removed from this example.

Prior to heading to the bank with your big deposit, you need to fully understand and be a master at articulating dinner party logistics, have a solid foundation for your business (regardless of how big or small you intend to be), understand marketing as it pertains to this unique service (next chapter), know how to extract the information you need from a client so as to satisfy and deliver beyond expectations, plus all the little things that take place behind the curtain which nobody else thinks about or really cares about – except for you. Your foundation, planning and time efficiencies will pay handsome dividends and make life easy for you so that you can focus on the extra touches that will be rewarded by repeat business and excellent word-of-mouth promotion.

Get 6 people in a room and ask everyone what they would charge for a three-course dinner, you would get may get 6 different answers. And that is fine, as not everyone is expected to charge the same. Some chefs charge an hourly rate plus the cost of the food, some don’t. It is easiest to charge a flat per-person rate. This tends to level out expenses over the long run. Depending on what menu the customer selects, you’ll make more on some dinners and little less on others. Over the long haul, your average food cost should be 24-28% of the total event invoice. The rule of thumb is to never allow food costs to exceed 30% of your total invoice. 22%-24% would be valid for a Personal Chef Service, but with dinner parties you are using food products at the very upper end of the scale, so food expenses are expected to rise slightly.

You will have occasions when special pricing is offered to customers who either use your services several times a year or have been doing dinner parties with you annually for a long time. Basically, a fixed price of \$75 - \$150 per person covers dinners for 2 to 12. Above 12 you start to lower the per-person costs so as not to out price yourself and lose the business. You will find that as the number of guests’ increases, the cost of food increases too, but at a slower rate, since adding a few more plates does not necessarily add that much more to the basic supply costs. In doing cost computations, the soup, salad and sometimes the dessert on the dinner menu can be very inexpensive and easily increased from 2 to 4 to 6 or 8, contrasted with the increase in the protein costs.

The longer you do this the fewer things you may have to purchase. You will find yourself accumulating many items such as herbs and spices, oils and vinegars that you do not need to purchase each and every time you cook. Also, the more you do this the more proficient you become in purchasing your food items, thus lowering your cost per event. After a while you’ll know exactly how much meat, fish, or chicken it is going to take to feed a group. You purchase just what you need once again cutting your food costs down.

MARKETING

No matter how well you master all the elements discussed so far, if the phone doesn't ring, you'll never be putting your skills to work. This section will address marketing and selling of you and your service.

Now you've identified general themes to steer your client toward. Each of the four events has a uniquely different style and purpose. Listening to your client and their vision for the event should provide you with the direction. And when your client is still grasping for a concept, you can ask probing questions to help identify a service style that would work. Budget, formality, access to appropriate table settings, venue restrictions and time available can all be factors in your event proposal. Think of this as a cruise – your client knows the destination, and you are along to steer the ship and offer navigational tips for a successful journey.

Target Marketing

A **target market** is a group of customers that the business has decided to aim its marketing efforts and ultimately its services. A well-defined target market is the first element to a marketing strategy. The target market and the marketing mix variables of product, place/location, promotion and price are the two elements of a marketing mix strategy that determine the success of a product or service in the marketplace.

Once these distinct customers have been defined, a marketing mix strategy of product, distribution, promotion and price can be built by the business to satisfy the target market.

Target markets are groups of people separated by distinguishable and noticeable aspects. Target markets can be separated into:

- ◆ geographic segmentations (their location).
- ◆ demographic/socio-economic segmentation (gender, age, income occupation).
- ◆ psychographic segmentation (similar attitudes, values, and lifestyles).
- ◆ behavioral segmentation (occasions, degree of loyalty).
- ◆ product-related segmentation (relationship to a product).

How Do You Market The Concept Of A Dinner Party?

Most folks like to entertain, be it for family or friends. What they don't like to do is the shopping, prep work, cooking, and cleanup. That's where you come in. Letting them know that you can handle those chores allows them to become "guests" at their own party. Sell the hostess and you are in!

Marketing dinner parties is a lot like growing grass. You need to "sow the seeds" to get started. Once the seeds are sown, you need to water and nurture them until they produce the lawn, or in our case, the dinner party you want to hold.

How do we do that? Well, to begin with always be on the lookout for opportunities to suggest having a dinner party or get together. Everyone has to eat, right? So why not have a little fun at the same time. Become familiar with the Who, What and Where of marketing a service.

You Eat With Your Eyes

Presentation is a very big part of the dinner party program. The food not only has to smell good and taste good, but it also has to look good. Take some time and research books on food presentation. Experiment with different looks and how to plate your food; make notes on what works and what does not work. Sometimes using different style plates and/or size of plates can make something look great. Try to use seasonal garnishes, but always – please always – wash and check any garnishes that come from the garden. Uninvited little guests can ruin a great dinner party. If it is on the plate, it should be edible.

Exceeding Expectations

Great customer service means exceeding customer expectations. This could be fixing some small hors d'oeuvres that they did not expect or just leaving a little box of truffles for after dinner. It is the little things that most customers remember and tell others about. Pleasing customers and exceeding their expectations can produce a lot of quality, rewarding repeat business.

Handy To Have

- ◆ Empty tin cans to use as molds, you can never have too many.
- ◆ Squeeze bottles, again a dozen or more.
- ◆ Various sizes of doilies for platters and presentations.
- ◆ Various sizes of melon ball scoops.
- ◆ A butter curler/hook (it's a good investment).
- ◆ Assorted shapes and sizes of plates and platters.
- ◆ A mandolin for fine julienne cuts and ultra-thin slices.
- ◆ Tweezers for plating and garnishing.
- ◆ Picture frames for menu presentation.
- ◆ Decorative paper for menus.
- ◆ An attractive business card holder to display at events.
- ◆ A professional chef's jacket/apron/pants.

(See data CD for a more comprehensive mobile kitchen list)

Ordering Food Ahead

There are some items in the supermarket, which are not always readily available and even if they are, it pays to make sure that they have the item you want on the day of the party, plus you'll save some shopping time. Consider ordering ahead items such as:

- ◆ Special cuts or types of meat.
- ◆ Certain seafood or fish.
- ◆ Produce that may or may not be available that day.
- ◆ Some of the more unusual items in jars and cans.

Make sure that you have plenty of blank forms handy next to the telephone. Change or add to the form if you wish or re-type it on your own letterhead.

See a sample agreement on the data CD.

Curriculum And Lesson Plan Development

A class, by definition, suggests that there will be an instructor, a lesson and students. You are the expert, otherwise why has someone given you money to come talk and share your knowledge. The way you structure your class is not terribly different between the class types (I, D, N). You have an opening or introduction, the body of the lesson (the objective) and a close or recap period.

Your curriculum or class outline can be relatively simple. This would be an outline showing someone interested exactly what you are teaching and what information they will take away from the experience. If you involved any type of textbooks, those should be mentioned here as well. Since your class is narrowly defined and concludes in one lesson, your true curriculum is a fairly short list. An example may be viewed on the data CD.

You will develop your lesson plan starting with a bullet point outline. Keep the flow in sequence and do not assume someone knows an important element that hasn't come up in discussion to that point. Refine your bullet points with subcategories of the topics you need to address or demonstrate. The third pass starts to plug in examples and notes for you to absolutely include. The lesson plan is for you. If you feel the class is going to cover a wide range of issues, you may want to assemble a class outline, so that the student knows what is in store. Since your class is between 90 minutes and 2½ hours in length, you probably won't need any type of class outline, other than a verbal overview as you begin with your introduction. Your lesson plan is not intended for you to hold and read from – this is intended for you to refer to if/when needed. This will contain interesting trivia as it relates to a food item or utensil for example. Your lesson plan should be a one page item, double sided at the most. Include time notations, to show where you should be by a certain point. If your class drifts too far and spends too much time in one area, you either have to start cutting other items out or keep people longer than they anticipated – both of which are poor choices. Fifteen minute allowances is reasonable – but going shorter or longer starts to become an issue, so try hard to stay on time.

Thirty minutes straight usually requires a five minute rest period to stand up and stretch. Five minute breaks are generally long enough to let people refresh. Ten minute breaks allow people to drift away either in person, or in concentration. Breaks are not mandatory, but should at least be offered every so often (for you as well as the student). If you build in three breaks for a 90 minute class, and none get used, you're still only ending fifteen minutes early – within the allowable range.

Course Materials



Often times you will not have any course materials to distribute. Your knowledge will be more functional in nature. For example, if you are providing a class (generally for 2-4) on kitchen layout, kitchen gadgets or other general areas concerning culinary, you will be doing a lot of show and tell type teaching. You don't need to whip up cream just to explain what a whisk can be used for. If you were conducting a wine pairing class, you may have materials that fill in more detail about a particular wine region or process, to accompany your main lesson about what wine goes with what food.

If you are involved in a team-building exercise by a company, the company contact may provide you with whatever handouts or elements are required, if the class is specific to their business or industry. Your role in that situation is getting people to communicate and share their resources. Two heads are better than one type exercise.