

get a lot of good, basic information from the Internet, the Small Business Administration and any library or bookstore.

The real problem lies, not in how to write the business plan, but in how to make it work in your new and unique business - a Personal Chef Service business. Look at it this way, if you know how to use a hammer and nails, that doesn't mean you know how to make a house. As previously stated, in this manual we give you the information that is pertinent to the operation of a successful Personal Chef Service business. This helps you complete the vital process with purpose and confidence, and much faster than if you had done it on your own.

Some people think they can start a Personal Chef Service business by just having great culinary abilities or credentials. The truth is that people who do not fully prepare themselves, and are lacking in other areas necessary to running a business, are setting themselves up to fail.

While a "will to win" is important, it takes a "will to prepare" to ultimately succeed.

You may be saying to yourself, "Well, that's fine, except that I already know where I'm going. I know who my customers are. I still don't need a business plan." That is a mistake. When you speak to an entrepreneur who has had serious problems running a business, you frequently find there was no business plan written. There were no clear, concise thoughts or methods regarding how that entrepreneur was going to succeed.

Without a business plan, it becomes more difficult to organize, control and coordinate the multiple functions of your Personal Chef Service business. Without a business plan, you don't know where you're going or how you're going to get there. You can be one of the most dedicated, hardworking, committed Personal Chef Service business owners in the country, but without some sort of business plan you are a ship without either rudder or navigational chart, and your chances of running aground are very real.

## **The Entrepreneur's Analysis Of SWOT**

**Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats**

Take a 'truthful' look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats YOU will bring to a Personal Chef Service business. Conduct this exercise, then sit with a friend and ask him or her to critique what has been written. A good friend will be honest and whether their critique is good or bad, it is their opinion as a result of knowing you. There is nothing wrong with having weaknesses, except the failure to realize they really are weaknesses. Once 'the facts' are known, work can begin on turning weaknesses into strengths.



### Identify Your Strengths

Where do you excel?

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## STRUCTURING THE BUSINESS

The type of ownership that you select for your Personal Chef Service business is important. This can be changed later on, but you're inviting hassles. You will be setting up the legal structure of your business, so it's best to get off on the right foot.

There are several ways to structure a business. With a Personal Chef Service there are generally two options, which we will cover here. Please refer to the PCS data CD for a review of other, more complex corporate structures.

The two most common business structures for a Personal Chef Service are sole proprietor, and sole proprietor LLC (limited liability company). Each has advantages and disadvantages, but in truth, are very similar. Some questions you should ask yourself when considering how to structure your Personal Chef Service business are:

- ◆ In what areas of the business will I need help?
- ◆ How much money will I need to get started?
- ◆ What kinds of risks will I be exposed to?
- ◆ How can I limit my liability?
- ◆ What kinds of taxes will I be expected to pay?

Information on partnerships and C corporations can be found on the PCS data CD. You may ask why partnerships is not included as a viable structure for your new business. With two decades of personal chef business development and models as history, the simple fact is that, when creating a Personal Chef Service, partnerships rarely work. You and your partner(s) may have all the faith, all the best intentions, and complete confidence that you'll be a team in 12 months, but history shows otherwise. The partnership situations that do work involve family members (two sisters, brother sister, mom and daughter, etc.).

Why the high failure rate for partnerships? A Personal Chef Service is easily handled by one person. A partnership where one person does the accounting, scheduling and admin while the other just shows up to cook sounds great, but it rarely works for long. A situation where both partners are going to be the chef as well means a division of the admin duties, which almost always fall on one person's shoulders instead of both. Two chefs in the kitchen at once is a recipe for disaster. Two chefs handling their own unique clients may work, but two chefs sharing a client list will be a huge problem. The client has a comfort zone with you, and not someone else who you endorse. We know this sounds harsh – we're just giving you a snapshot at history. Nobody started a partnership expecting it to fall apart. If all partners cannot do exactly what they want, have all the required admin duties covered and make an equal share, the partnership gets out of balance, and someone gets hurt (usually all partners). Then there is the hassle of starting fresh with your business set-up, and if you were sharing a client list, hang on for a wild ride separating that out!

Because there is overwhelming historical data to show that partnerships usually do not work in a Personal Chef Service business, we will not be proposing this as an option for initial consideration. If you feel your situation warrants this path, please review the PCS data CD first.

## **Decide Your Service Mix**

As a business owner, it is prudent to decide what variations to your standard service you will make available to prospective clients. There will be situations you encounter where your service might need to be adjusted to fit the specific request of a client. You need to determine what you are comfortable changing or adjusting in your service (e.g., cooking for single people, families of 3 or 4, families larger than 4, restricted diets, extra guests, etc.). This preparation will benefit you because you will be prepared to answer inquiries.

So, what exactly does a Personal Chef Service include? In essence, a personal chef offers a professional service of meal preparation. A client's individual tastes drive the creation of their customized menu. These personalized meals are prepared especially for a client, individually packaged, labeled and stored in the client's refrigerator or freezer.

The meals are more than great tasting food - they are an embodiment of the precious gift of time and the answer to the age-old question: "What's for dinner?" A Personal Chef Service is cost effective and can actually save customers money. How much time is expended and money spent to dine out, pick up food, make trips to the grocery store, or prepare the evening meal? A Personal Chef Service is a cost-efficient alternative.

More specifics about your service mix options will be detailed later in this manual

## **Customized Menu Planning**

A Personal Chef Service takes the time to learn the individual needs and preferences of their clients. They use this information to create delicious meals personalized to the individual tastes.

## **Grocery Shopping And Meal Preparation**

A Personal Chef Service performs the shopping, purchasing the freshest and finest ingredients in order to prepare the personalized meals for the client. You are not buying and re-selling food items. You are including the shopping and delivery of groceries in your service fee, or purchasing these as a courtesy to your client, who has or will pay for the groceries. Unless you operate from a commercially licensed kitchen, you may not purchase groceries ahead of the service date and store at your home, with pantry items being the exception.

Does the business intend to be everything to everyone? Or are there cuisines or styles that showcase the talents and abilities of the business? The following is a listing of the more common categories of meals prepared by personal chefs:

- ◆ Kosher
- ◆ South Beach diet
- ◆ Vegan/Vegetarian
- ◆ Home-Style
- ◆ Low-calorie or low-fat diet
- ◆ Lactose Intolerant diet
- ◆ Gluten-free
- ◆ Low-cholesterol diet

# CLIENT KITCHEN OPERATIONS

## At The Client's Home

When you arrive at your client's house, you need to gain access to their home. This must be prearranged with your client, which is usually done near the end of your in-home sales presentation.

## Setup

Once in the house, begin to unload the groceries, pantry box and all other boxes containing your tools, equipment, etc. This may take several trips, so find the easiest route. Small collapsible wheeled carts can be very useful here. This is a perfect time to peek into the freezer to make certain you have available room. If for some reason the freezer does not have the space available as your client was instructed, there is no reason to keep going until the space issue is resolved.

## Your Working Space Setup

Set up your working space in the client's home in the same place every time. Place your cutting board in the most logical location and then arrange your boxes within easy reach, placing the box of "hand tools" closest to you. Place the box of car "pantry" items (salt, pepper, vinegar, flour, sugar, etc.) in the next closest location, preferably beside the "tool" box. Your pantry box, which was packed at home, usually stays on the floor very near the cutting board location. The remaining boxes are placed wherever convenient.

Unpack the groceries and pantry items, storing meats, cheeses, fresh herbs and anything else needing refrigeration in the refrigerator. Place all the vegetables and the canned goods close to your working center, and all dried goods anywhere it's convenient. Using plastic and paper grocery bags, make "trash cans" by folding down 2 inches of the top edge of the paper bags to form a sturdy sack. Put the sacks into the plastic bags to keep any wet items from leaking through the bag onto the floor. One of these "trash cans" may be used to collect recyclable items. At the end of the day, put the full wet-trash bag out in the client's outdoor trash receptacle. Then take the bag of recyclable items home.

Try to store all your refrigerated items, including your lunch and drink in one place in the refrigerator, so that at the end of the day it will be easy to find the things that are yours to take home.

If your client has items in a space on a counter that you need, remove them and place them in another location, mentally noting where they all belong so that you can put them back exactly where you found them.

## Preparing And Storing Lettuce And Other Greens

If there are salad lettuces to be washed, cut and stored, especially in hot weather, do this task first. Fill a very clean sink or deep pan with the coldest water possible (sometimes using ice cubes in very hot weather) to "crisp" the lettuce. This method keeps the lettuce crisp and staves off wilting. Cut the lettuce and place it in the cold water, swirl it around to rinse off any dirt, and then let it sit so the dirt sinks to the bottom. Then gently pulling the lettuce from the top put it into your salad strainer and spin once, removing the excess water. Spin the lettuce once again to remove any remaining water. Place the lettuce in a paper towel-lined large Zip-Lock type plastic bag and store in the crisper section of the refrigerator. Paper towels help absorb any excess water that, if left on the lettuce, promotes browning of the leaves. If this procedure is done properly and the refrigerator does its job, the lettuce will keep for at least one week and up to two weeks, depending on the freshness of the lettuce.

## **Business Policies**

The personal chef's policies will be discussed during the agreement review. These are your policies which you have already drafted and made part of your business. These are not formulated on the spot, except for very unusual circumstances. The following are common issues outlined in a business policy statement. Feel free to amend as needed, so long as each client falls under the same set of policies.

### **Service cancellation:**

How much notice must you have. Will the service be rescheduled? You will not have any hard cost prior to a service, because groceries are purchased the day of the service. But, you did block a date for a client, which means you have just given up a day of service income. A three day notice is not out of the question, although many personal chefs allow 24 or 48 hours without penalty. What would a penalty be (\$\$\$)? This is one exception to the rule above stating all clients need to be treated equally. If you have a long time client and something comes up preventing a service, you should certainly waive any cancellation fee. If this were a new client who was beginning to show signs of being a flake, stick to your policy and justify by stating you cannot secure another service on 48 hours' notice (regardless of if you can or not).

### **Menu approval:**

You need to hear back from the client with enough time to react should they have a new request or don't care for what you've presented. Finding out that they don't want a certain meal the night before puts everyone (mainly you) in a pinch. Set a deadline for their approval, or new request.

### **Kitchen:**

You should have, and explain your policy about kitchen cleanliness for the day of service. Counters cleared, dishes washed, ample room in refrigerator and freezer. If you arrive and need to spend 45 minutes just getting the place in order, that is a waste of your time, and directly impacts the service. Also, do it once, and you'll most certainly be doing it again for that client, because they know you will. The client needs to directly communicate with you prior to the service in the event an appliance is not working properly.

### **Pets and guests:**

Will you allow pets to roam the home and potentially the kitchen during your service? Cats often enjoy jumping on the counter to see what you're doing, and potentially shredding hair along the way. Nothing will end a service faster than a client finding hair – any hair – in their meal. Dogs and cats can easily sneak up behind you and cause a dangerous situation. Despite the fact that the dog laid down and tripped you, you are the one who will take the blame, and heaven forbid you got gravy or some other food on the animal. People are slightly different, and it is more difficult to keep people away, however, know that other people in the kitchen will slow you down, and may also cause harmful situations. You do not want kids or anyone for that matter in and behind you, in and out of the fridge, setting plates down in your work area, etc. And anyone who "hangs around" to chit-chat will just distract you. They'll want to know what you're doing, why you use this instead of that, etc. all innocent chatter, but you will be slowed down. Time is money. If you have a policy that you need a clean, uninterrupted kitchen during your service, and explain the safety issues and probably the insurance issues, few if any clients will mind. When you go to the auto garage, you're required to stay behind the yellow line – same applies here, for many of the same reasons.

### **Taking calls, messages, or receiving packages:**

Are you going to answer the door for the UPS man? Do you answer the door for anyone? Do you answer their phone? What will, and won't you do?

- ◆ Everything must be properly packaged. Stews and other “runny” products should be tightly closed in rigid containers. Vegetables packed “loose” should be wrapped “skin tight” as nearly as possible in moisture-vapor proof materials.
- ◆ Label all packages with the name of the entree or side dish, the number of servings and the date prepared.
- ◆ Promptly place packages in food freezer in single layers.
- ◆ Freezing must be rapid to preserve the natural color, flavor and texture of delicate fruits and vegetables and to prevent spoilage of meats and prepared foods.
- ◆ Frozen foods must be used within a reasonable time since there is gradual loss of quality of all frozen foods. Most cooked foods have a relatively short shelf life, so it is best to use combination main dishes within three months. If a client has not eaten some food from your last service, put those meals up front and the new recipes behind, placing most recently prepared foods at the bottom or back. Leave a note and remind your client that to retain the quality they desired, these meals should be consumed by \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.
- ◆ Frozen foods must be cooked and served properly. For best quality, meats and vegetables must be cooked and served immediately upon thawing; most vegetables (and some meats) are cooked in the frozen stage; and precooked main dishes should be thawed, heated and served in succession. By following this rule of thumb, the fine quality of your meals will be maintained.

*See expanded freezable food lists on the data CD.*



### Your Test Kitchen

The freezing information and lists of what freezes well, etc. is assembled from two decades of direct personal chef feedback plus testing in a controlled environment. Individuals have experienced varying degrees of success with some items, like mayonnaise. The lists of what freezes and what does not should be your starting point. If in doubt, follow the list. However you are highly encouraged to evaluate results in your own test kitchen. You are going to test your recipes before providing to a client – so why not take this opportunity to prepare a second meal or portion with a specific ingredient test in mind.

You will also find a huge variety of excellent recipes in publications like *Cooking Light* and *Fine Cooking*, where the recipe says it will not freeze. Evaluate the recipe and find out why. Often times the ingredient(s) that won't freeze may be substituted, or added at the time of final heating by the client.