



A culinary purpose

Associate FCSI member **John Reed** looks at the values a written culinary directive can bring to a foodservice operation

When chefs think about food, they see things from many angles and not necessarily from an ingredients perspective. Throughout the evolution of modern cuisine, culinary teams have been influenced by nature, architecture and music. Today's chef is pressured by the many hats they wear, from the culinary artist, the entrepreneur, the social media manager, philanthropist, spouse, partner or parent. Keeping track of one's thoughts is time consuming and personal.

As for the chef part, culinarians are, first and foremost, leader of a brigade that they rely upon to make their culinary vision come together, one plate at a time, through exceptional food. To help bridge the gap between a personal vision and flawless and unified execution, it is important to write a culinary directive, which helps set a list of accountable actions and control points for the operations team. A well-planned culinary directive can help provide purchasing, production, marketing and training plans through to actionable steps.

When culinary operations are stretched across many locations with multiple kitchens and diverse staff; having an articulated directive gives the on-site team a vision of the chef's or the culinary leadership's thoughts and goals.

A culinary directive is not something you can write overnight. Breaking down the key components or focuses first helps define the actionable steps associated in creating the food in the kitchen.

In a recent project, we worked with a large foodservice company with 24 locations spread over a large metropolitan city and its surrounding suburbs. We analyzed their facilities, current food production capabilities, existing equipment and skills sets. That was compared to their business goals to create a set of six core culinary focus points. Each point was given actionable and definable steps to validate any culinary process or direction across the organization. The goal was to take the passion and learned experiences of the executive culinary leadership and put it in the hands of the direct operational staff in a clear and workable format.

The key focus points of the culinary directive for this corporate dining services company were as follows:

- 1 Technique
- 2 Flavor concentration
- 3 Nutrition
- 4 Sourcing
- 5 Intent/presentation
- 6 Portions

These six points focus on areas within their operations that traditionally required a more hands-on approach of direct supervision from a well-trained senior culinarian. Switching them to a global approach through common operating procedures using the same criteria for validation, created a higher level of culinary focused communication.

In their market place customers were looking for freshly-prepared food, made to order with a minimum of time for order and assembly. Customers requested flavor-rich, controlled portion sizes. So, to execute that in a system-wide process with a low availability of advance cooking technology, we developed many criteria across the focus points. Here are three we developed under Technique:

- Three-step station assembly
- Increased use of complex multi-ingredient prep items
- Convenience product over house-made if quality is surpassed

Once developed, the senior culinary team had an effective tool that could be used for vertical communication throughout the organization. It was used in marketing for new customers and for validation of new menu development and employee training.

Each year the focus points are re-evaluated to meet current or new demands on the business. Focus changes over time and having the ability to communicate to the organization on where and how exceptional food is going to be achieved is essential in today's marketplace. ■

John Reed CEC®, CCA®, Certified Cicerone®, is the owner of Customized Culinary Solutions in Skokie, Illinois, US customizedculinarysolutions.com