The decision to pursue certification from a professional culinary association is a difficult one for many people. Certification requires time, money, and effort. Not everyone who attempts a certification exam passes, so many people worry that their efforts will be for naught. Other people fear that a failed attempt to acquire certification will ruin their reputation in the culinary community. Still others do not see the value in investing in a certification.

Certification offers a number of benefits, however. It validates a person’s qualifications and skill sets. Some organizations require employees in particular jobs to hold a certification, while others pay higher salaries to certified workers. A certification behind a person’s name conveys a sense of status and achievement to the public. It may also help with networking in some associations. The benefits of certification, for some people, make the challenge of earning it worth the effort.

In this chapter, you will learn how to decide whether or not certification is right for you. You will also learn about the many types of certifications available through a range of professional organizations. Finally, you will learn best practices for completing certification applications and for preparing for certification exams.

The Decision to Get Certified

Not everyone needs to get certified, but many people do benefit from earning a professional certification. First ask yourself whether or not you need a certification to thrive in the industry. You must then consider the likelihood that you can earn the certification you want. For example, you might benefit greatly from becoming a certified master chef, but there is no point in pursuing that certification if you are not sufficiently experienced and prepared to pass the lengthy exam. You might conduct a self-analysis only to find that you are borderline-ready to earn a certification; when this happens, weigh the advantages of pursuing the certification now against waiting until you are better prepared. All of these issues must be considered to make a thoughtful, informed decision about pursuing a certification.

Who Needs Certification?

There are some people for whom the decision to get certified is simple. If a person needs a certification to keep or to obtain a desirable job, then that
person needs to get certified. If a person would earn a higher salary by earning a certification, he, too, should attempt certification. However, the decision to get a certification is not quite so simple for many people.

When certification is not a job requirement or a salary booster, then a culinary professional must honestly assess his culinary prowess and reputation. Someone with strong skills who is not well known as an expert in his market will generally benefit from certification and should pursue it. In this case, the “market” is the audience a person needs to impress. For some chefs that market is a customer base while supervisors and potential employers constitute the market for other chefs. If a chef’s market already knows and respects him, a certification is not necessary. For example, Bobby Flay does not need certification because his customer base, potential employers, and the media already view him as an expert chef and restaurateur. A certification would not add to his reputation, but a failed certification attempt might detract from it. However, an unknown chef in a low-profile job or one who recently relocated to a new city would benefit greatly from the stamp of approval of a national certifying body. In short, if you are not a local celebrity in your market, you will likely benefit from certification.

Are You Certifiable?

Fortunately, only celebrities run any risk of encountering bad publicity for failing a certification attempt, but the average, unknown chef still faces the costs of lost time and money from a certification attempt that ends badly. Do not begin the process unless you are fairly certain that you can meet the certification criteria. How do you decide if you are likely to make it through the process? Follow the following steps.

First, locate the requirements for certification on the certifying body’s website or speak with an already certified professional about the assumed body of knowledge for a given certification. Nearly every organization providing a certification tests applicants on their knowledge of particular subjects. Finding out the subjects tested allows chefs to decide whether they possess sufficient knowledge to pass the exam. If a person does not know at least 70% of the body of knowledge tested, that candidate is unlikely to pass the exam. For example, if a test covers the topics of cooking, baking, and table service equally, and a person knows nothing about baking and table service, that person is probably not ready to test for this certification.

Next, request sample tests from the certifying body. Some certifying organizations have sample exams or descriptions of exams to give people a sense of what to expect. Read through the sample test to determine the subject areas where you need remediation. You may find that you know almost every question on the sample exam, in which case you will probably find the actual exam easy. However, if the practice test seems exceedingly difficult, you may wish to study diligently before taking the exam.

Finally, ask for recommended reading lists or other resources to strengthen your skills for the test. If there is a major benefit to becoming certified, a person should not give up on certification solely because of a difficult practice exam.
Even those chefs with broad knowledge bases often find that they benefit from reviewing recommended books. Exam preparation should be taken seriously by all applicants.

What if You Are a Borderline Case?
Some certification candidates conduct an in-depth self-analysis only to discover that they are borderline-ready to pass a certification exam. What should you do in such a situation? On the one hand, there is some value to taking the exam even if you fail it. Failing gives you a better sense of what to expect next time on the exam. It will let you know how to prepare better for your second attempt or perhaps reveal that you are not an appropriate candidate for that particular certification. On the other hand, taking an exam, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, costs time and money. You might decide to wait until you feel better prepared for the exam to risk your investment. Still, you should not put off certification indefinitely. Too many people give up before even trying to pass the exam, and the earlier you earn a certification, the sooner you begin to reap its benefits. Usually a year of serious study and practice is more than enough time to convert a borderline case into a strong candidate for certification.

Types of Certification
There are many types of licenses and certifications that a cook or chef can obtain. Knowing the particular focus of each license and certification helps people to determine whether or not a given credential is appropriate for them. It is also important to consider how the culinary community views a certifying organization. Is the association viewed as certifying restaurant chefs, culinary writers, or nutritionists? Do industry professionals respect the certifying group or do people believe that it certifies anyone willing to pay a fee? Answers to questions such as these will guide you in deciding whether a certification from a particular organization will be valued by others and useful in helping you to meet your goals.

This section includes a list of various organizations and the credentials they provide. The list is not meant to be comprehensive; these are merely the certifications for cooks and chefs most commonly seen in the culinary industry. Certifications for wine professionals, front-of-house staff, nutritionists, and others are not covered here but instead can be found fairly easily via an Internet search.

Food Handler’s License
The food handler’s license is probably the most commonly held culinary credential in the foodservice industry. Based on the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) Food Safety and Inspection Service requirements for foodservice establishments, this license certifies that a culinary worker understands the principles of safe food handling. Since the license is generally administered
by a local jurisdiction (county or conglomeration of counties), the food safety regulations may vary slightly from one locality to another. However, a student who has performed well in a culinary school’s food safety and sanitation course will likely have little difficulty in acquiring the food handler’s license.

Most jurisdictions require that at least one person with a food handler’s license be present at a foodservice operation while it is open. This requirement means that having a food handler’s license can help a person to obtain and keep a job over people without the license. Therefore, this license is one that all culinary students should pursue as soon as possible after graduation, if not sooner. Culinary professionals generally obtain the license in one of two ways. Either they take an exam through their local health department (or its proxy) or they take a national exam, such as the National Restaurant Association’s ServSafe exam, and present their scores to the local jurisdiction. Some schools give the ServSafe exam as part of their curriculum. Note, however, that the exam results do expire, so be sure to pursue the license within a year of taking the exam.

More and more jurisdictions are requiring that culinary workers also document completion of a food safety course, not just a passing score on a test, to earn the food handler’s license. A food safety course in culinary school generally suffices although health departments may refer foodservice workers to local programs offering food safety courses. These courses may not be necessary if you did well in your college food safety course, but many people find them a good study aide prior to taking the exam.

Requirements for renewal of the license vary greatly from one jurisdiction to the next. Some simply require that the license holder pay the fee to renew the license before it expires. (In many cases, a person who does not renew before the license expires is treated as a first-time applicant.) Other jurisdictions mandate that license holders take a refresher course as part of the renewal process. A review of your local health department’s website or a quick phone call

---

**CHEF INTERVIEW: TRAVIS W. SMITH**

Chef Smith is Founder and President of Bistro Colorado Inc. in Evergreen, CO.

**What is your certification?**
The American Culinary Federation’s Certified Executive Chef (CEC), Certified Culinary Administrator (CCA), and American Academy of Chefs (AAC).

**When did you first get certified and at what level?**
1989 as a Certified Culinarian (CC) at the conclusion of my apprenticeship. Certification was part of the ACF apprenticeship. The next level was Certified Chef de Cuisine (CCC) in 1996.

(Continued)
What was the process like for getting certified?
There was a written exam and lots of documentation on work history and other professional activities. Preparing for the exam was exciting. I enjoyed the preparation for the written exam.

How did you prepare for certification?
I studied the recommended materials and then took practice exams to prepare for the written exam.

What value has being certified provided you in your career?
Certifications helped me to get promoted in the military when I was serving. The certifications also helped me to qualify for employment once I finished my military service. They opened doors at Francis Tuttle Technology Center and at Breckenridge Ski Resort where I served as the Executive Chef. The certifications also helped me to get hired as a professor at The Art Institute and Metro State University of Denver.

What advice would you give culinary students about certification?
I believe that students should apply when they are eligible to receive their first level. Some college programs offer certification in conjunction with graduation. Prepare for the exams just as you would a final exam for your college coursework, and do some practice sessions for the hands-on cooking exam with a certified proctor.

to a health inspector will inform you of the requirements for application and renewal in your local area.

American Culinary Federation Certifications
The American Culinary Federation (ACF) is one of the oldest culinary associations in the country to award certifications for chefs. The ACF system offers 14 different types of certifications to meet the needs of culinary professionals at various stages in their careers. The ACF measures a person’s education and work experience to determine the level for which a candidate qualifies. Although the requirements for each certification vary, all candidates are required to document education in sanitation, nutrition, and management.

In addition to education and work experience requirements, all ACF certification levels require written and practical exams. The questions on the written exam vary by certification level and become more challenging at the higher levels. The practical exam requirements, too, correspond to the level of certification pursued and the requirements do change periodically. However, assessment for the exams generally covers four areas: food safety and sanitation, organization, cooking skills and culinary craftsmanship, and taste and presentation. An example of a typical certified culinarian practical exam would be: to prepare julienne and batonnet carrots, fine chopped parsley, and standard mirepoix; to fabricate a chicken and to use the carcass to begin a chicken stock; and to prepare a sautéed chicken breast entrée with appropriate vegetable and starch accompaniments in a two and one-half hour window. The American Culinary Federation website (www.acfchefs.org) provides detailed information on the requirements for each certification level as well as a listing of practical exam site locations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Experience (must be within the past 10 yrs)</th>
<th>Additional Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC® - Certified Culinary® CPC® - Certified Pastry Culinarian®</td>
<td>High School Diploma or GED or 100 CEH or Culinary Arts program Certificate (1 yr.) or Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts or ACFEF Apprenticeship program</td>
<td>2 yrs. entry level culinarian/pastry</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam (exempt if graduate of ACF accredited program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSC® - Certified Sous Chef® CWPC® - Certified Working Pastry Chef®</td>
<td>High School Diploma plus 50 CEH or GED plus 50 CEH or 150 CEH or Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts or ACFEF Apprenticeship program</td>
<td>5 yrs. entry level culinarian/pastry</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC® - Certified Chef de Cuisine®</td>
<td>High School Diploma plus 100 CEH or GED plus 100 CEH or 200 CEH or Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts or ACFEF Apprenticeship program</td>
<td>3 yrs. as Sous Chef or chef who supervises a shift or station(s) in a foodservice operation. Must have supervised at least 2 FT people in the preparation of food</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEC® - Certified Executive Chef® CEPC® - Certified Executive Pastry Chef®</td>
<td>High School Diploma plus 150 CEH or GED plus 150 CEH or 250 CEH or Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts or ACFEF Apprenticeship program plus 50 CEH</td>
<td>3 yrs. as Chef de Cuisine or Executive Sous Chef/ Pastry Chef or chef in charge of food production in a foodservice operation. Must have supervised at least 3 FT people in the preparation of food</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC® - Certified Master Chef® CMPC® - Certified Master Pastry Chef®</td>
<td>High School Diploma plus 150 CEH or GED plus 150 CEH or 250 CEH or Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts or ACFEF Apprenticeship program plus 50 CEH</td>
<td>See CMC®/CMPC® Manual</td>
<td>See CMC®/CMPC® Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Experience (must be within the past 10 yrs)</td>
<td>Additional Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC™ - Personal Certified Chef™</td>
<td>Same as CSC®</td>
<td>3 yrs. as an entry level culinarian plus 1 FT yr. as Personal Chef</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCEC™ - Personal Certified Executive Chef™</td>
<td>Same as CEC®</td>
<td>3 yrs. FT as a Personal Chef engaged in all aspects of food preparation and management</td>
<td>Written Exam Practical Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA® - Certified Culinary Administrator® (Must be current CEC® or CEPC®)</td>
<td>Same as CEC®</td>
<td>3 yrs. as an Executive Chef in charge of all culinary units in a food service operation. Must have supervised at least 5 FT people.</td>
<td>Narrative paper Written Exam for CCA®Must be CEC®/CEPC®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCE® - Certified Culinary Educator®</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts plus 120 hrs. Education Development** or Bachelor’s Degree in any discipline plus 120 hrs. Education Development**</td>
<td>2 yrs. (FT) as a Chef de Cuisine or Working Pastry Chef, within 10 yrs prior to employment as a culinary instructor, 1200 Post Secondary contact hrs. (FT or PT within the last 10 yrs.)</td>
<td>Classroom Video Written Exam Practical Exam for CCC® or Practical Exam for CWPC®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCE® - Certified Secondary Culinary Educator®</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts plus 120 hrs. Education Development** or Bachelor’s Degree in any discipline plus 120 hrs. Education Development** 30 hr. (course) Basic Food Prep.</td>
<td>1200 Secondary or Postsecondary contact hours (FT or PT)#</td>
<td>Classroom Video Written Exam Practical Exam for CCC® or Practical Exam for CWPC®</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All levels must include 30 hour courses in Nutrition, Sanitation and Safety, and Supervisory Management.

*PCC™ & PCEC™ require 30 hour course in Business Management in place of Supervisory Management.

Exempt from taking Practical Exam if awarded a Gold or Silver Medal in either an ACF F-1 or F-5 Individual Competition or WACS Hot Food Competition within the past 5 years or Team USA member participating in IKA or World Cup in past 5 years.

**Education Developments include: Curriculum Planning & Development, Evaluation & Testing, Teaching Methodology, Educational Psychology.

#Contact hours are actual teaching hours at an accredited institution. Hours should be documented by the respective school on official letterhead. Written Exam scores valid for two years. Practical Exam scores valid for one year.

Source: Reprinted with permission of the American Culinary Federation.
Although the certifications vary greatly, the ACF certifications are most appropriate to people working in a foodservice establishment either as “food-preparers,” as managers of food-preparers, or as instructors teaching in culinary programs. The type of food prepared (savory or baked goods), the type of work (cooking, personal chef work, or management), and the specific job responsibilities and number of people supervised determine which certification is most appropriate for each applicant. The ACF offers certifications specifically for culinary educators at the high school and the college level; these certifications require both culinary and instructional expertise. The certified culinarian and certified pastry culinarian are appropriate credentials for recent culinary school graduates.

**American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute Certifications**

The American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI) offers a wide range of professional certifications. Although their list of certifications provides options for workers across all aspects of the hospitality industry, there are two certification levels most appropriate for chefs: the Certified Food and Beverage Executive (CFBE) and the Certified Hospitality Educator (CHE). The CFBE relates most directly to industry chefs, while the CHE is designed for teachers. CFBE candidates must document at least 1 year of experience in their current job as an executive level manager (like executive chef) and must pass a written exam. CHE applicants, who must possess both teaching and industry management experience, must attend a CHE workshop, pass a written exam, and submit a videotape illustrating their teaching proficiency. A full list of certification options is available through the AHLEI website at www.ahlei.org/Certifications/AHLEI-Professional-Certification.

**International Association of Culinary Professionals Certification**

The International Association of Culinary Professionals offered one comprehensive certification—the Certified Culinary Professional (CCP)—but that certification became inactive in the fall of 2015. As current CCPs were awarded lifetime certification, students may still see the certification used in the industry, but the IACP no longer accepts applications for new CCPs.

**International Food Service Executives Association Certifications**

The International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA) offers three tiers of certification: the Certified Food Associate (CFA), the Certified Food Manager (CFM), and the Certified Food Executive (CFE). The IFSEA certifications require an application documenting formal education and/or work experiences as well as content knowledge verified through a written exam. The level of certification is determined by education and years of experience in the field. The CFA, the beginning level of certification, is appropriate for recent culinary school graduates. More information on the IFSEA certifications can be found at www.ifsea.com.
National Restaurant Association Education Foundation Certification

The National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF) offers a single certification—the Foodservice Management Professional (FMP). The FMP requires supervisory work experience and completion of a food protection management exam, such as the NRA's ServSafe exam. Consequently, most culinary professionals with experience in foodservice management will find the FMP easy to acquire.

The NRAEF also provides single-topic certificates verifying content knowledge on a range of subjects through its ManageFirst program. Individuals can use ManageFirst study guides to prepare for each exam and can earn certificates by taking exams even while still in school. Although a single certificate documenting subject proficiency is valuable to an employer, the NRAEF allows people to earn an even higher credential—the ManageFirst Professional (MFP)—by demonstrating certain work experience and passing five exams in specific topic areas. While the FMP certification is appropriate for foodservice managers, ManageFirst certificates are highly appropriate credentials for recent culinary school graduates. More information on the NRAEF certificates and the FMP can be found at www.managefirst.restaurant.org.

Research Chefs Association Certifications

The Research Chefs Association (RCA) offers two certifications: the Certified Research Chef (CRC) and the Certified Culinary Scientist (CCS). The CRC is appropriate for people with culinary arts education, while the CCS is designed for individuals with a food science or related degree. Both certifications require education and work experience in the foodservice industry and in culinary research and development; both also require a written exam that tests food science and culinary arts knowledge. While these certifications are not appropriate for all chefs, they are highly valuable for chefs working in product development divisions for food companies. More information on the RCA certifications can be found at www.culinology.org.

Retail Bakers of America Certifications

The Retail Bakers of America (RBA) association offers four different certifications for bakers and pastry chefs. Recent culinary school graduates can acquire The Certified Journey Baker (CJB) through bakery work experience and passing a written exam. The other levels of certification require more substantial work experience (4 years for Certified Baker and Certified Decorator; 8 years for Certified Master Baker), a practical exam, and verification of food safety and sanitation knowledge through an exam such as the NRA's ServSafe test. The Certified Master Baker credential also has additional education and professional development requirements not needed for the other certification levels. Although not designed for line cooks, the RBA certifications are appropriate for all culinary school graduates who devote their careers to...
TABLE 21.2 Retail Bakers of America Certifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified Journey Baker (CJB)</td>
<td>A baker at this level assists in the preparation and production of pies, cookies, cakes, breads, rolls, desserts, or other baked goods for a commercial bakery. Duties may include stocking ingredients, preparing and cleaning equipment; measuring ingredients, mixing, scaling, forming, proofing, oven tending, and product finishing. He/she must demonstrate a basic knowledge about the principles of sanitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Baker (CB)</td>
<td>A Certified Baker prepares and produces baked goods while assisting with general commercial bakery operations. He/she has considerable responsibility and autonomy and participates in a broad range of both complex and routine work activities, including supervision of other staff and allocation of resources. He/she must demonstrate a basic knowledge of bakery sanitation, management, retail sales/merchandising and staff training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Decorator (CD)</td>
<td>A decorator at this level and for this designation prepares and finishes sweet baked goods for a commercial bakery. Duties include preparing icings, decorating a variety of cakes using various techniques, seasonal displays and specialty designs, and working with customers. He/she demonstrates a basic knowledge about sanitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Master Baker (CMB)</td>
<td>A baker at this level and for this designation participates in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities, performed in a wide variety of contexts with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and allocation of resources is present. He/she must have the technical and administrative skills necessary to operate and manage the production area of a full-line independent or in-store commercial bakery. He/she must produce high quality bakery foods, and demonstrate a basic knowledge about the principles of sanitation, management, retail sales/merchandising and training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reprinted with permission of Retail Bakers of America.

working in commercial bakeries. For more information on the RBA certifications, visit www.retailbakersofamerica.org.

**United States Personal Chef Association Certification**

The United States Personal Chef Association (USPCA)\(^9\) offers a single certification—the Certified Personal Chef (CPC). This certification’s requirements include 2 years of work experience as a personal chef, certification as a food safety manager, and completion of the USPCA written exam. Although the work performed by a personal chef takes place in a kitchen, preparing food for clients in their homes for possible storage and future reheating differs significantly from the work typically performed by chefs in a restaurant. Therefore, the certification
is solely appropriate for people working as personal or private chefs who wish to demonstrate professional credentials to potential clients. Possession of this credential by personal and private chefs can make a significant difference in acquiring clients who require a verifiable level of professional skill and knowledge. For more information on the USPCA certification, visit www.uspca.com.

Preparing the Application

No matter which certification you pursue, there is a basic process that makes applying for certification simpler. First, obtain or print two copies of the application form from the certifying body. Most allow individuals to download the application from a website. One of the copies will serve as a scratch copy for notes and the other copy will be used to fill out and submit the final application. Using the scratch copy, fill in as much information as you can recall off the top of your head.

Once you have your scratch application outlined, locate documentation to verify the information you have listed. If you are missing needed documents, contact those people who can provide them to you. For example, if you need verification of past employment, contact your old employer or supervisor; if you need a transcript, order one through your school. During this process you may locate or recall other activities to add to your application.

Once you have gathered enough documented points (most certification applications use a point system) to meet the minimum requirements for a certification, complete the clean copy of the application with all of the pertinent information. If the application is normally submitted online, enter the information electronically as directed on the association’s webpage. The certifying body generally provides instructions on how to assemble the completed application. Be sure to follow its instructions before mailing, faxing, entering, or uploading the application. Because you are applying for a professional credential, a professional looking, easy-to-navigate application may make the difference between a smooth application process and a quick rejection.

If the first draft and the documentation-gathering process reveal that you do not have enough verifiable points to meet the certification criteria, do not throw out the application. Instead, make a concerted effort over the next year or two to perform tasks that earn points. Enter a competition. Engage in some community service, or pursue additional education. Gather corroborating documentation as you complete each activity, and store it with your application. When you have finally gained enough points to meet the minimum standards of the certification, complete and submit the final application. Using this process will help you to pursue certification in a direct, efficient manner without overwhelming you along the way.

Preparing for the Exam

Completion of the written application is only the first step in the certification process. Most certifying organizations require you to pass a written and/
or practical exam. Once you have submitted the application, contact the association’s certification division and request a reading list. Most associations recommend the books and resources from which their test questions are taken. Study the recommended texts for several months. Take notes; make flash cards. Generally prepare for the exam as you would any major exam in college. You may wish to work with a person who has already been through the certification exam to get a better sense of what to expect and to help direct your studying.

Get the guidelines for the practical exams from the association administering them. Most of these exams will be exceedingly difficult without some practice prior to the actual test, so practice regularly until you can consistently complete the exam at a high standard within the time frame. If you know of someone else taking the exam in the weeks or months before your testing date, observe that person’s practical and learn from his successes and mistakes. If possible, ask a certified person to observe and evaluate your practice sessions to provide suggestions for improvement prior to your exam. Always practice under similar conditions to those expected during the exam. For example, if you will only have one oven and one prep table during the exam, do not use two ovens and two tables during your practice rounds. With a practical exam, most people perform about as well during the exam as they did during their practice sessions, so be sure to practice often until you can “pass” the exam consistently during practice.

Chef Interview: Sevilla Riley

Chef Riley is a Personal Chef and Sole Proprietor of Chef Sevilla in Frisco, TX.

What is your certification?
Certified Personal Chef (CPC) through the United States Personal Chefs Association.

What made you decide to get a certification?
I’ve been a certified personal chef for over 5 years. By being a certified personal chef I had to continue my education in the culinary field. I also was introduced to some areas of the culinary field that I didn’t think I would be interested in, for example, teaching and also some community service activity.

What value has being certified provided you in your career?
Here is what the USPCA says about being a personal chef: “The USPCA Certified Personal Chef credential is the mark of experience and dedication to the Personal Chef industry that is earned through a combination of business activities, skill building and education. It is the best way to add credibility to your portfolio when calling on clients.” The process is a lot of work—continuing education with cooking classes and with continuing to build your business/clientele. But by being certified I believe that I was able to acquire a higher level of clientele.
The certification process is difficult for most people. If it were so easy that anyone could do it, a certification would have little value. However, a devotion to study, practice, and self-improvement greatly increases a person’s chances of acquiring a certification.

Summary

Although not everyone needs a professional certification in the culinary industry, culinary professionals who are not well known in their market can benefit from earning a certification credential from a nationally known organization. Typically the process for certification requires the completion of an application with accompanying documentation, a written exam, and in some cases, a practical exam. An applicant can often determine his self-preparedness for a certification examination by reviewing sample exams and recommended reading lists provided by the certifying organization. A wide range of certifying bodies exist, each offering varying levels of certification. Culinary workers interested in acquiring certification should research their options to determine which certification suits them best. Once an applicant determines the certification he wishes to receive, he should gather documentation to complete the application and then study thoroughly for the exams. In the event that an applicant is just short of meeting the requirements for a certification level, he should make an effort to work toward the completion of those requirements and to gather documentation of his achievements along the way for inclusion in the application. With sufficient preparation and study, culinary professionals have a strong chance of earning a certification to verify their skill sets and experience.

Keys to Applying for a Certification

- Research various certification options to determine the most appropriate certification.
- Complete a first draft of the application and collect the supporting documentation.
- Contact the necessary parties to obtain any missing documentation needed for the application.
- Make a concerted effort to complete the necessary activities to earn enough points for that certification level if you have insufficient points for a certification.
- Complete a final draft of the application, including only those activities with accompanying documentation, and submit the application.
- Obtain a recommended reading list and guidelines for exam preparation.
- Study actively for written exams.
- Practice for practical exams repeatedly.
- Complete the process by taking all required exams.
Suggested Tasks

1. Determine what certification would be most appropriate for your current skill set and experience. Obtain a copy of the relevant certification application, and complete it to see if you are eligible to test for that certification. Request a study guide and/or practice exam for that certification, and evaluate your familiarity with the required knowledge base. If a certification is something you desire, submit your application and take the test(s) to get certified.

2. Research two chefs—one with a certification and one without certification. See what kind of jobs they have. Compare the information you have gathered to your professional career goals. Do you believe certification will help you to achieve your goals? If so, determine the certification you would like to pursue and begin taking part in activities that will help you to acquire that certification.

3. Contact your local health department. Find out where and how to obtain a food handler’s license. If you currently possess an exam certificate, such as the ServSafe certificate, ask if that certificate can be converted into a license. Follow through on the instructions you have learned and get a food handler’s license within 30 days.

4. Partner with a classmate (or divide the class into two teams), and debate for and against certification. Discuss the pros and cons. Make the case for your side. Discuss as a class when and why it would be appropriate to pursue certification.

Notes