

APPRENTICESHIP
IT WORKS

APPRENTISSAGE
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Matt Hall

Food for Thought



I grew up with parents that had little interest in fine food, and as a child I thought I wanted to be a politician. As I grew older I began getting jobs as a dishwasher in cafe's and restaurants. At one position as a dishwasher I had an employer who was about 4'2" and as I am 6'4" they had sinks that were just off the ground so that she could reach in and wash a dish or two if she was so inclined. I found that after a week my back was beginning to ache because I was always bent over picking up dishes. So one day my employer came to me and asked (in a strong northern Italian accent) if I was interested in making salads and sandwiches on the line as opposed to washing the dishes. Of course I said yes and from that day onward I've been in love with cooking any and all types of food.

As a teen I worked in many different kitchen styles and settings. From catering to hotels and fast food joints, I worked in a hotel for my high school co-op program and it was there I had my first taste of well crafted, fresh, fine food.

Ever since that first day as a line cook, I knew it was what I wanted to do and for the past 7 years I've been trying to hone my skills as a cook and a culinary professional. I knew I was a quick learner and that I have good communication skills but that sometimes I found myself maybe focusing a bit too much, which led me to missing orders or not catching special requirements of a dish. So I work on that, always knowing exactly what needs to be done, always listening to everything my co-workers say and making sure that I am heard above the noise of the kitchen.

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It is definitely difficult in these hard economic times for everyone that is out of a job to find a new employer. I find that going out day after day to the same places and making sure you speak with the manager as opposed to a bartender or waitress is key in finding a job. It's definitely a nerve racking challenge but if you are determined enough and willing to prove yourself people should always be able to find somewhere to work. Just going out day after day and handing out resumes is how I tend to do it.

If you go out with a bad attitude and a chip on your shoulder people will see that and you probably won't get the call back you need. Going out with a smile and a firm handshake, saying yes ma'am or yes sir at every interview and listening attentively will almost certainly get you that second interview. As for at work, I go in everyday with a cup of coffee and the knowledge that no matter what happens, how hard we get hit at lunch, at the end of the day, if I've done the best that I can, then no one can take that feeling of accomplishment away from me.

A "good" employer sponsor relationship is just having a boss that is willing to listen and be a bit bendable over a menu idea or a dish that I want to create. That is the most important thing for me. If I wasn't loyal to my employer, I wouldn't be employed. People in the food service industry can pick up on those that don't have a sense of loyalty and passion about what they do. People who jump from job to job usually don't end up doing very well.

What I've learned that could help other people find an employer with whom to apprentice is to be honest. If you're not that experienced don't try to get the position by telling them you're a 4-star chef. Just be truthful about what you know and what you want to learn and in the end you will be a better person for it.

Matt Hall has been passionate about food since he was 15 years old. Now, at 22, he has completed his final year as a cook apprentice and is happily working in a top-rated restaurant in Regina, SK. His younger brother has now joined him in the trade.

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