

The inexplicable desire to make the best chicken wings. Going the extra mile to make homemade dressings instead of pulling them out of jugs. The dauntless courage of the fry cook who experiments with everything from cubes of cheddar to a Mars candy bar (purportedly a Scottish delicacy at certain fish & chip shops in the land of the Loch Ness Monster). The tireless efforts of the cook shaving beef before she throws it on the grill at your favorite Philly cheesesteak stand. The server, who not only knew how to serve you that nice bottle of wine, but was also knowledgeable during the selection and food-pairing process.

Together, these make up our hedonistic fantasies as we imagine the perfect food experience, no matter what our individual tastes may be. However, in the world as we know it, at least as it pertains to eating out at our favorite digs, this emotion or drive does not always manifest itself in our presence. And while we may all love eating out and letting someone else do the cooking and cleaning, I can attest that I rarely leave a restaurant feeling terribly good about the experience like I used to. Now, don't blame this on my profession, as most people would be quick to point out. I share this sentiment with many others who are not in the industry, and I think there are a few reasons as to why.

In the old days, we had a greater percentage of professional employees in the business, and while that holds true to a certain degree in some restaurants, at present the majority of restaurant employees merely work there until they land their 'real job'. I see it every day, not necessarily where I work, but at many places where I decide to dine.

And when the service is not that great, the food is blasé, and the overall experience does not amaze, it gets harder and harder to shell out the \$60 - \$100, a rare treat to begin with.

Another reason I feel that the restaurant scene may not be hitting the mark overall as of late is as follows. The market is flooded with incalculable new restaurants on every corner (each one promising 300 new outlets within two years to their investors). Take these cookie-cutter restaurants, menus and service training programs; it no longer becomes a guess, at least for me, as to why we are sometimes faced with substandard experiences when we dine out. The individual is gone, replaced by a mass-marketed onslaught of predictable eateries.

Where am I going with this? Effort, originality and enthusiasm. These traits when found in a restaurant team, make any diner comfortable in their experience (barring terrible food) and it really does not take that much to spark that in some people. Unfortunately, you can't give this trait to people. You have to dig it out of some, and that is truly the challenge of the modern restaurant manager.

With a fair amount of coaxing, getting the team excited about the business, and of course developing your personality as you hopefully help others to develop theirs, there exists a much greater chance that a kitchen manager can create a team of candy bar fryers and beef shavers, and yes, the perfect buffalo wing has yet to be created, which gives the modern manager of food the greatest challenge of all. Dare to dream.