

How to stay motivated on your career path as a chef



By [Janine Fourie](#)

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I have just realised that I will be celebrating my 20th year as a chef in 2018. What a ride it has been! This got me thinking - there are far more “wannabe-chefs” entering the industry these days, than when I started, but the sad thing is that so many drop out along the way and few ever reach the top of their game.

Food channels and reality cooking shows glamorise the industry and make a chef’s life look as if it is all fun and joy, but the reality is very different.



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Being a chef is not for someone who likes to plod along in the slow lane. The pace is hectic. You have to think on your feet, be creative and wow diners with amazing food – all of this under pressure while keeping everyone in the kitchen and the restaurant happy.

Hot kitchens, crazy shifts, irregular hours and working on weekends and public holidays play havoc with family and social life. The climb up the ladder can often get waylaid on the chopping block, leaving one feeling disheartened. The secret is to stay passionate, creative and motivated even in the tough times.

How to remain faithful to your chosen career path as a chef:

- **Find a mentor.** They should preferably be in the hospitality industry so that they have a better understanding of your environment. A calm, guiding force and someone to turn to when things are rough is a blessing to have in your life.

- **Turn negatives into positives.** Reflect on the more-hysterical days and tell yourself you survived! Try and analyse where you could have done better or give yourself credit if your dish turned out a success and garnered compliments. Handle criticism and don't take it personally.
- **Be inspired.** Read books, go online, eat out in other restaurants, experiment with different ingredients or have a fun cook-off with a like-minded foodie.
- **Take time out.** If you feel yourself suffering from severe burnout, try and take some time off. Catch up on sleep, walk the dog, watch a movie or two and spend quality time with family and friends to regain some perspective.
- **Stay focused.** Keep reminding yourself why you decided to become a chef in the first place. Keep the passion alive, write down your goals and set timelines to achieve them.
- **Challenge yourself.** Brush up your cooking techniques, learn new skills or take a master class or two.

Chefs in charge of a kitchen should also play their part in encouraging their team to be the best they can be. Bullying and verbal abuse is counter-productive to getting the best out of your staff. Discipline is important, but be constructive in guidance, treat staff with respect, make sure everyone knows their area of responsibility, involve staff in decision-making and share the glory with the team after a successful service or event.

Lead by example and maintain a positive attitude in the kitchen. Take the time to build confidence, pride and effective teamwork. Hire passion and train skill and create an environment where good cooks will never want to leave. If any of your chefs do move on to bigger and better things, pat yourself on the back for helping them along on their journey.

ABOUT JANINE FOURIE

Chef Janine Fourie is the head chef at Big Easy Winebar & Grill in Durban.
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