

# The Kitchen Code: Ethos of the Professional Kitchen

Most (but not all) cooks and chefs tend to be "potty-mouthed sailors" who lack the social willingness to be "nice" to people who are pricks (i.e. some customers), and we would be much more likely to say, "Fuck off!" to an unreasonable guest than to say, "I apologize for that sir, how can I help?" That's why we are in the kitchen. It's hot, dangerous, stressful...an adrenalin rush...we love it here! A lot is expected of us...and we expect a lot from each other in return. You **MUST** pull your own weight to be respected by your peers and superiors in the Kitchen. There is no one "star" player, the whole crew is dependent upon each other to win...or everyone sinks together.



Following is the unspoken code of the professional kitchen. If you have been in the industry for a long time then you realize that this is true at most of the well-run places you have ever worked. And conversely, everyplace you worked which had crappy food or low moral probably had staff which did not follow "the code".

To those who have never been in a professional kitchen, these seem harsh, archaic even. But for everyone who has endured the long, hot, stressful shifts of a full-service kitchen these standards make total sense. You understand that with every dish sent from the Kitchen, we are being judged by a guest who is going to be either happy or dissatisfied with the work we have just done. Judged not just once per shift, but judged a hundred or more times every shift, every day!

You understand that to reach the level of perfection which we must attain for every single meal served to be excellent, it requires an extreme demand upon personal responsibility, reliability, and execution. It takes pride to do what we do daily, and pride in our work does not come cheap...it demands personal integrity and commitment. The unspoken rules of the Kitchen Code make our lives easier, not harder. It brings order and discipline to the chaotic, difficult environment we work in.

Understand that these are the unwritten code, the ethos, of the Kitchen. You will not find them in a job description. They're not in the SOP's of any particular kitchen. The chef is not going to sit down and tell you every single one of these things. Many of these are simply learned as part of the culture of the kitchen. They are understood and expected by the cooks of a professional crew as well as by the chef.

**If you can't step up then get the hell out...  
we have work to do and you're in the way.**

## The Kitchen Code:

(not in any particular order)

1. You show up early and are at your station early, ready to work.
2. You arrive in a presentable fashion: showered, shaved, brushed, combed, and in a clean uniform. Last night's entertainment is not discernable.
3. You have a genuine enthusiasm for good food, good technique, and culinary advancement, regardless of how much you already think you know.

4. You maintain a good attitude, finding satisfaction in doing good work.
5. You are coachable and don't get defensive when criticized.
6. You are not a know-it-all (the opposite of being coachable).
7. You don't take yourself too seriously and are able to laugh at yourself if you fucked up...but you also learn from it.
8. You do not dwell upon or allow the feelings associated with a fuck-up to distract you. Instead, you keep your mental focus in the game and move on. If you need to discuss it with Chef then do so after service has ended.
9. You season everything with the "correct" amount of seasoning as per the Chef's preference (not your own).
10. You taste everything in your station, making sure it is correctly made and of proper quality.
11. Dull knives are disrespectful to ingredients - you have a sharp knife at all times.
12. You **NEVER** use someone else's knives without their permission. As Anthony Bourdain says, "Don't touch my dick, don't touch my knife."
13. You do not complain – especially about those things which cannot be controlled, such as customer requests/returns, the restaurant hours of operation, having to work weekends/holidays, how busy or slow it is, etc. all.
14. You show respect for the food, for the Chef, and for how we want things done at THIS restaurant (not the way some other chef did it at some other restaurant you worked at...we don't care).
15. You show respect for fellow co-workers (team members); this includes cooks, dishwashers, bussers, prep cooks, food runners, expeditors, and servers (yes, the servers too!).
16. You do not expect or demand respect from others. You understand that respect is earned: a) by being equal or better than everyone else in the kitchen, and b) by treating everyone else like they are equal or better than you.
17. You understand the importance of a fully staffed crew and you do not call in sick so you can go to that concert, or party.
18. You consistently show up for work...if you are sick then be prepared to provide a drs note to prove it (too many have violated the other members of the Saturday night crew by calling in sick to go to a party).
19. If you have a mild cold, or a headache, or a hangover, you are not sick...show up for work.
20. You don't get sick often.
21. You have the ability to stay focused under pressure – expect to be in the weeds often... and work your way out of it alone.
22. You're not afraid to ask for help if your station gets slammed...but you understand that help may not be available.
23. If your station gets utterly hammered and you sink, you don't give up and walk off the Line...you break out a shovel and dig your way out.
24. You are aware of the kitchen flow and take initiative...if your fellow cook is buried, you help them out.
25. You always rotate product properly, practicing FIFO (First In, First Out)
26. You always have enough mise en place for your shift.
27. You never throw product out due to over-prepping.
28. You **NEVER** steal someone else's mise en place.
29. You always prep fresh products daily...do not make tomorrow's chiffonade today.
30. When running low on a product for your station's prep you always let the chef know before the last of it is gone.
31. Never 86 anything unless there is no more product to prep. When running low on a menu item you always give the chef at least a one hour warning before having to 86 it. This allows a count-down for the servers so no customer orders it when it is gone; and it allows time to try to prep more or find a replacement.

32. You are fast, but not sloppy...your station is clean and organized even in the middle of the push.
33. You always have an extra gear available when needed.
34. You follow established safe holding temperatures and verify that your products in the hot Bain Marie and refrigerated holding inserts are at temp. You sanitize everything that comes in contact with food, ie. thermometers, utensils etc.
35. You organize your time efficiently, always planning ahead...you make fewer trips to the walk-in, always carrying something both ways.
36. You take your breaks when it's slow, and only with the chef's permission.
37. You restock your station before taking your breaks.
38. You manage your food well – if it needs to be in the window in 2 minutes you can make it happen. Or if you're told to slow a dish for 4 minutes you know how to do that as well.
39. You have an appetite to learn more, regardless of how much or little you already know.
40. You prepare and present the food exactly as the Chef has taught you...every time.
41. When you're having a **great day** you focus, prepare, & present the food properly throughout your entire shift.
42. When you're having a **shitty day** you focus, prepare, & present the food properly throughout your entire shift.
43. You do it right, without taking shortcuts, even if it's a tedious pain in the ass. This is called **Professional Discipline**.
44. You do not bring your personal drama to work with you. You take control of, and are responsible for, your "Emotional Wake".
45. You are not afraid to ask appropriate questions about proper procedure...do not hack up an entire tenderloin because you are too arrogant, or too scared, to ask for a demo.
46. You work neatly and clean as you go.
47. You properly label and date EVERYTHING.
48. You admit when you are wrong, but don't point it out when others are wrong – especially if it's the chef.
49. The kitchen is not a democracy...always do it the Chef's way, even if you think your way is better. If you must suggest something, do so in private...hopefully the Chef will give you kudos if he accepts the revision...but don't expect it.
50. "Yes Chef!" or "Oui Chef!" is the only proper response to any directive from the Chef. If the Chef says, "Please do it this way" understand that he/she is not offering you a choice; you are politely being instructed how to do it and your compliance is expected.
51. You always give call-backs when orders are called.
52. You work in a safe manner, thereby protecting yourself and others from harm.
53. You always use appropriate kitchen warnings such as, "Behind", "Corner", "Hot", "Knife", "Oven Open", etc.
54. You are willing and able to work long hours under high stress, sometimes for many days straight, w/o becoming a moody detriment to the kitchen or the food.
55. You work for the good of the team and the restaurant.
56. You plan ahead and ask for days off well in advance.
57. You always know exactly what is in your oven, or on your stove or grill, even if it's not yours.
58. You are aware and observant in the kitchen: you smell when food doesn't smell or feel right. You notice if the temp in a cooler is too high. You smell if something is burning.
59. You have a "sense of urgency".
60. You work efficiently as regards time and organization, meaning that items which take a long time to prepare are started before items which take less time. During service, if you have a dish which takes 10 minutes to prepare, one which takes 5 minutes, and one which takes 2 minutes, you are able to time and prepare all three within 10 minutes and hit the window at the same time; and it does not take you 17 minutes because you prepared them one at a time.

61. You always tell the chef when you leave the Line, including why you are leaving, "Off Line for shrimp".
62. When it's slow, you always find something useful to do, including cleaning your station or organizing the walk-in. "If you have time to lean you have time to clean."
63. Always treat equipment with respect, as if you paid for it yourself.
64. Always work in a manner which meets the health code, ensuring that you're not going to get someone sick.
65. You understand the proper use of foodservice gloves. They are a pain in the ass, but they protect our guests. No glove, no love.
66. Know the difference between a cut and a scratch; a cut requires stitches, a scratch does not. If it's a scratch put a Band-Aid on it and get back to work. If it requires only 2 or 3 stitches, please return to finish your shift after the doctor is done. The crew and the chef will both respect and appreciate you more for it.
67. If you do return to work with injuries, be wise enough to work within your restrictions and not cause yourself additional injury.
68. You daily rotate all your mise en place on the Line into clean containers at closing.
69. You stay until all the day's work is done properly w/o asking to leave early. You ask if there's anything else that needs to be done before leaving.
70. You mentor new co-workers as you would have liked to have been mentored/taught, not necessarily how you *were* taught.
71. You manage your "recreational activities" wisely...too many of us become addicted to alcohol or drugs.
72. To be recognized as a leader in the kitchen...you know the kitchen code, practice the code, and mentor the code. (I know...sappy and proselytizing! But how else could you possibly end "The Code..." of anything?!)

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