

Culinarian Boot Camp 2024

SUNY Cortland

Introduction:

Cortland Auxiliary Services designed its Culinary Boot Camp to give entry-level food preparation workers the skills to move into higher-skilled positions, laying the groundwork for growing a culinary team in our own organization. This became an operational goal as finding culinary talent was difficult, and to maintain a high level of service, we needed to develop those skills in our employee base. Employees are given class training and the manager ServSafe test as part of this training program. The other four days are spent on a variety of critical culinary skills.

Essay:

Boot Camp was created as a joint program between the culinary management team and the training coordinator. This four-day intensive program took shape using the culinary team's skills and the training department's experience with training development.

Boot Camp is open to all full- and part-time CAS employees. Inquiries are accepted until spring break, when the instructors compile lists and accept classes. (Cortland_BootCamp_2024_LogoAndPromo)

The program's goal is to develop staff who can provide exceptional customer service and prepare great food. Employees are trained in culinary skills, presentation, and food safety. (Cortland_BootCamp_2024_Schedule.pdf)

Programmatic success is measured in several ways. First, the culinarians must pass ServSafe manager training. At the end of Boot Camp, they take a cook's test to put their skills into practice. The test is the same one required to qualify for any cook's

assistant or cook position that becomes available on campus. This test is also required to join the culinary management team. (Cortland_BootCamp_2024_ClassPhotos)

Employee retention is also measured in conjunction with their promotional progress.

Introduction:

With first-year retention rates for food and hospitality workers as low as 62%, turnover is a consistent and stifling problem for dining providers. Many factors play into retention concerns; traditionally low pay, night and weekend shifts, hard work, and lack of advancement are common exit interview highlights.

This program allows employees to set themselves up for advancement, which increases wages and gives them the skills to manage the hard shifts that are unavoidable in the industry. Retention of Culinary Boot Camp participants one year after completion currently sits at 95%.

Essay:

Across the organization, employees who complete the Culinary Boot Camp have higher-than-average retention. The average retention rate is 4.6 years for all employees. Boot Camp culinarians average 6.3 years; the percentage should climb as the program continues.

Employees who complete the program are also consistently in the higher tiers of the union scale for job progression. When culinary skills were a condition of their promotion, 58.9% of participants received at least one promotion since completing Boot Camp. Fifteen percent were promoted to some level of culinary management, either directly or after the first promotion. These employees, who became culinary supervisors and sous chefs, are now involved in preparations for next year's Boot Camp. In this way, they can share their experiences and encourage the new class.

Introduction:

Recruiting for collegiate food service positions is not easy. Most food service workers do not consider colleges and universities a job option. The seasonal nature of school schedules and the difficult working conditions lead to these being jobs, not careers, and jobs that are hard to fill. CAS advertises that we will train for any position and have promotional tracks for employees interested in culinary development. This program features prominently in that discussion.

Essay:

Our recruiter uses our training programs as a starting point for potential employees who may say, "Oh, I don't really know how to cook." The response is, "It's OK, we will give you the skills to become a great cook."

When the program began, job openings were divided into four equal areas: management, culinary, line service, and utility work like dish room and pots. Open positions are now heavily weighted toward line service and general utility positions, some of which have been empty for an entire semester. Culinary hires were previously almost exclusively external but have transitioned to roughly 40% internal promotions, all of whom were participants in the Culinary Boot Camp.

Recruits see that, by taking advantage of the training, they can join a growing number of employees who go from inexperienced, untrained workers to skilled culinarians who can move within the organization. These skills are also valuable if they want to expand their horizons beyond the organization. (Cortland_Book_JoinOurTeam_Flyer)

Four participants have taken culinary leadership roles in other organizations based on the skill growth they developed here. Former employees speak well of the organization and its ability to grow employees and encourage others to give it a shot.

Introduction:

CAS encouraged its management to provide opportunities for employees to learn and use new skills and advance within the organization. Employees who are satisfied at work are often more productive and provide better customer service.

Essay:

Boot Camp participants often appreciate that the organization would take the time and energy to grow that person. This shows a willingness to follow through on a commitment to employee development and growth.

Upon completing the program, each participant is acknowledged on our internal news screens and company newsletter. At the next all-company training, CAS awards them certificates in front of the entire company so they can be celebrated for their achievements. They also receive a Certified Culinarian polo to wear instead of the regular-issued uniform to showcase those achievements. New employees notice these and often ask how they can get their own shirts. It drives interest in the program and keeps the conversation about development and growth alive.

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