



## 5 Tips for Hiring the Best Senior Living Culinary Team

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Hiring a top-notch culinary team involves much more than finding a few good chefs. The qualities of a successful senior living culinary team are unique and highly specialized to our industry. In my 13-year career in senior living communities, I've seen firsthand just how important the dining experience is to residents and sales prospects, and how the right culinary team can make the difference to both.

Here are some key guidelines, proven strategies, and invaluable traits to look for when assembling your culinary team:

1. **Put Service First** – Friendly and attentive service is just as important as delicious and nutritious meals. Your senior living culinary team needs to be personable, courteous, and attentive. Make it clear that a chef's job goes far beyond simply cooking and serving. In the dining room, they command tremendous respect in what is the social highlight of many residents' days. Don't underestimate the personal touch. Daily interaction with culinary team members can be the secret ingredient that rounds out a resident's already delectable dish.
2. **Value Versatility** – Excellence in whipping up tasty meals for a variety of dietary needs is essential since seniors often eat personalized diets based on medical conditions or prescription medications. From low-sodium heart-healthy options to Mediterranean-based dishes crafted to support memory

care, culinary team members must be equipped to prepare a range of fresh menu options. Flexibility, creativity, innovation, resourcefulness, and attention to detail are essential to adapting dishes to specific diets and incorporating subtle substitutions that can both please palates and introduce new tastes.

3. **Embrace Input and Involvement** – Residents must feel that they have a say in their dining experience. It's common practice for senior living communities to welcome a new resident by incorporating one of his or her home recipes into the menu. Beyond that, culinary teams should cultivate opportunities to gain input and feedback. Even criticism offers an opportunity to build a relationship. Often residents feel validated by being heard and in turn share personal cooking tips, thus gaining a sense of purpose. Let's face it: the meal is going to be a subject of conversation. The culinary team might as well be a part of the dialogue.
4. **View Dining as an Extension of Sales** – Understand how the dining component operates in sync with the sales team. As part of the tour experience, the culinary team is on the frontline of your sales strategy nearly every day. Meals must be orchestrated carefully, executed efficiently, and presented perfectly. This calls for constant communication, shared goals, and the alignment of expectations to ensure the dining experience differentiates your senior living community. Most importantly, culinary and sales team members must recognize this partnership and support each other as their success is inextricably linked.
5. **Make Community the Main Course** – Above all, residents must feel at home when they sit down to enjoy a meal. That's why it's up to your culinary team to make the dining room more than just a place to eat. By putting passion into cooking and creating an environment for laughter, conversation, and celebration, you're offering something that is even more valuable today than it was a decade ago – real community. The dining room is where the magic happens: stories are shared, friendships made, and holidays celebrated all over a warm plate. The Community is the Commodity, and great culinary teams know how to bring all the right flavors together.

Over the years, I've seen chefs with impressive resumes find their way into senior living communities and rise to the challenge, rediscovering their love for cooking along the way. After all, the opportunity to share their culinary passion, bond with residents, see their dishes from a new perspective, and reinvent themselves and their menus almost daily can't be replicated in any other industry. When you assemble the right culinary team, it's rewarding and fulfilling for both team members and the senior living community as a whole.

At the end of the day, working in any aspect of a senior living community is more than a career – it's a calling of caring and that is only magnified when it comes to the kitchen. Remember, your culinary team is cooking for people who themselves spent years of their lives cooking for their own families. It's a family-oriented experience and must be embraced as such. The best chefs aren't just cooking for residents. Rather, they put love into every dish, as if it's for mom, dad, grandma, or grandpa.



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