

From Student to Service: A Chef's Playbook

By Chef Ryan Hartel

This playbook is written for student chefs standing at the edge of the real kitchen.

Culinary school teaches you *how to cook*. Professional kitchens teach you *how to survive, grow, and win*.

What follows are the **three biggest lessons** I wish someone had drilled into me before I stepped onto my first real service. These are not textbook ideas — they are earned through burns, long nights, mistakes, and years on the line.

If you understand and apply these early, you will have a serious advantage.

1. Your Attitude Will Outpace Your Talent

Talent gets you noticed. Attitude gets you rehired, promoted, and trusted.

In professional kitchens, skill is assumed. Everyone can cook *well enough*. What separates chefs is how they **show up**.

What the Kitchen Actually Cares About

- Are you **on time** — or early?
- Are you **prepared** before service starts?
- Can you take instruction without ego?
- Do you stay calm when things go wrong?
- Do you clean without being asked?

A chef who is reliable, calm, and switched on will always beat a chef who is talented but difficult.

Real-World Truth

You will not be judged on your best dish. You will be judged on your **worst moment** — when the pressure is high, tickets are flying, and something goes wrong.

Your job as a young chef is simple: - Say yes, *chef* - Do the job properly - Learn quietly - Work hard consistently

Ego is the fastest way out of a kitchen.

2. Speed, Organisation & Consistency Matter More Than Creativity

Student chefs often chase creativity too early.

Professional kitchens reward: - Speed - Clean systems - Consistent execution

You are not paid to be creative — **you are paid to deliver the same plate, perfectly, over and over again.**

Mise en Place Is Everything

Your success in service is decided *before* service starts.

A well-set station means: - You move less - You think less - You panic less

Great chefs are not frantic — they are organised.

Consistency Builds Trust

If your dish changes every time, the head chef cannot trust you.

Once you master consistency: - You get responsibility - You get freedom - You earn the right to be creative

Creativity comes after control — not before it.

3. The Kitchen Is a Long Game — Not a Sprint

One of the biggest mistakes student chefs make is expecting fast rewards.

This industry rewards: - Patience - Repetition - Longevity

You will peel potatoes. You will prep endlessly. You will cook the same thing hundreds of times.

That is not punishment — that is training.

Think in Years, Not Months

Every task teaches you something: - Knife work - Time management - Pressure control - Discipline

The chefs who last are not the loudest or flashiest. They are the ones who **keep showing up.**

Build Your Reputation Early

Your reputation starts on day one.

People remember: - How you work - How you speak - How you handle stress

Kitchens are smaller than you think. Word travels.

Protect your name — it becomes your currency.

Final Word

If you take nothing else from this playbook, remember this:

Be reliable before being remarkable.

Master your attitude. Master your systems. Play the long game.

Do that, and doors will open.

— **Chef Ryan Hartel**