

# Sabbatical or Siesta...

## *That's the Question?*

Your chef tells you they'll be out next week. You ask, "What's up?" Your chef replies, "I'll be attending an American Culinary Federation (ACF) Convention in Hawaii." You tell them to enjoy the experience and to "bring some new ideas to the table," but you can't help your mind from wandering...Hawaii, \$\$\$\$\$; Why Hawaii, \$\$\$\$\$?

I signed on for *education* not *vacation*!

It all started when you noticed a lull in biz and lack of new specials being rotated into the menu. You told your chef to seek continuing education opportunities in the hopes of resurgence in business and onslaught of exciting new menu items. You agreed to reimburse expenses and picked a reasonable per diem. You want a great restaurant like the next guy, but where do you draw the "cost line" and how do you insure the chef is on sabbatical and not siesta?" Here's a couple of painless ways to monitor your investment.

**Certification:** Sign your chef up for an ACF membership and ask with bias for them to certify within a year. Although being an ACF certified chef is not the only mark of a quality chef, it has many advantages. Not only does it send your chef back to school to brush up on the basics, it tells the world that your chef has passed rigorous practical and written testing.

Additionally, it monitors the chef's continuing education for re-certification so you don't have to. It acts as a big brother of sorts...micro-management/observation can be the demise of a great working relationship. If your chef is heading to Maui with family and is not in the certification or re-certification process you may be suspect about the true motivator for the trip. However, if your chef is actively seeking an ACF certification, they must attend seminars and demonstration to gain required points that are monitored for content by the ACF national office for their own reputation and credibility. The fact that the family is along becomes less of a concern.

**Ideas on the Table:** One might think that a report from the chef would be ideal to monitor what learning took place on an education excursion but the best way is just to watch, listen and look for what new ideas hit the table. *Watch* what is coming out of the kitchen, what new products are being delivered or what new techniques are being taught to line staff.

*Listen* to your chef upon return...if they ramble on excitedly and can't wait to "give all the details" then chances are you will be seeing some results. In a nutshell, by observing the aftermath, you will learn quickly if your dollars will have a return or not. Just watch and listen and you will learn...if one month after the event it's business as usual and nothing new is surfacing you have a problem!

**Out of Control:** The best way to control the situation is by not trying to control it. Set a yearly amount the club will spend towards the chef's continuing education. Give the chef latitude to spend it on books, seminars, conventions, tools, or anything else pertinent

to the job. Maybe this year a couple of small seminars are in order but all monies will be spent at once in 2008 for a trip to Erfurt, Germany to see the Culinary Olympics. From my experience the amount of education funding, ultimately decided by the size of your operation and budget and should be between \$1,500 and \$4,000 per year.

The next time you wonder if your club's education-allocated dollars are really ending up in the education pot...look for climbing certification status, look for new ideas on the table and listen for the *Buzz* upon return! **BR**

*Chef Whitney Werner, CEC, is executive chef at The Beach Club in Santa Monica, Calif. and president and co-founder of Club Culinary. He is president of the American Culinary Federation's "Chefs de Cuisine of Ca Los Angeles" chapter and president of Les Amis de Escoffier Society of California. Chef Whitney can be reached at: [chefwhitney@clubculinary.com](mailto:chefwhitney@clubculinary.com)*



**Whitney Werner**  
*Executive Chef,  
The Beach Club  
Santa Monica,  
California*