

Camp Food Service Secret Weapon: The Production Record

By Paul "Bear" Bryant

Hi Gary,

Just read your recent Camping Newsletter. As usual, tons of great stuff. I haven't seen anything on food service in a while and thought that I might offer up some useful tidbit. (*Editor's note: the first of many puns*). As an architect I am sure that you have a similar tool as what I am about to describe.

As you know, my father in law is in the food service business. (More about Father-in-laws later.) One of the things he has pounded into my head over the years when I was working in a camp with a chef and a kitchen, was the use of a thing called a production record. It is essentially the recipe for an entire meal. It lists the number of people to be served as well as the quantity of food to be prepared (e.g. Thaw 6 cases of this, Sweat 20 onions, boil 10 lbs of spaghetti, etc.) The record comes complete with a section for leftover amounts so that if you found that you had X # of leftover portions of something (called overproduction - leftovers to you and me), next time the record could be modified downward or conversely, if you were still looking at hungry faces at the end of a meal having run out of something, you could notate that as well. These things save money. Dad routinely fired chefs who worked in his kitchens if they were habitual about NOT using them.

So many camps have chefs that order lots of food and walk into the walk-in and say, "Hmmm, how much should I make today?" as if God himself was going to help them divine what they should cook. More about God later. It is costly, leads to tons of waste. Every chef in camping should strive for "perfect production." By that I mean overproduction should be limited to a couple leftover portions a meal, at most. We



have used them effectively here for years and have saved a lot of money. I saw many a meal with near perfect production in my years here.

Since we are no longer a year round facility, we had to get rid of our full time chef. When we hired a food service company, the first thing I asked was, "show me your production records." The owner was glad to do it. Not only does that mean he will be saving money, it means he can charge us less too. Even with a food service we stand to save an additional \$30K this year. Their food is loads better than what we had before, too, and according to his production records and the per meal cost we were quoted, he's charging us less than what we were paying for food before. *Please note: I "secret shopped" their food at another camp before we decided to hire them. I think that I may put on a few pounds this summer.* I have attached what we used in the past. It is almost identical to the ones our food service company uses. It should be, the ones we used came from my father in law, who is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America (back when it was in New Haven). The ones our food service company uses are designed by the company's owner who ...is...a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America (now in Hyde Park, NY).

Now for the God and Father-in-law stuff. I am not a religious man. I would say that my in-laws attend church but are not in "God's Army." They are more like God's Secret Service - they attend at holidays and the occasional Sunday or so. So, at Easter when my father-in-law picked up the Bible and said for us to gather round him as he wanted to read us some passages, I was a little surprised. He jumped in at Exodus 18, and read verses 13-24. Jethro, Moses' Father in law was giving him some advice on ruling over and judging the disputes of the Israelites. It was good advice. Dad described as the first ever staff training plan. Dad went on to say that essentially Exodus 20 verse 1 through Exodus 29 Verse 42 was the first ever production record. First staff training plan and first ever production record right there in the Bible. Check it out.

In addition, there is a side benefit of P.R.'s. I would like to relate a story about my kitchen at Camp Hazen, also run by a CIA graduate, Joe Berg. Joe routinely hired Johnson and Wales culinary students (If the CIA is the food world's Harvard, J&W is its Yale) to work in his kitchen. On Joe's day off these chefs in training would follow the production record and prepare the meals without Joe's supervision. Indeed, a person with moderate cooking skills could follow a production record and get the meal out (nice to know that with P.R.'s, if your chef doesn't show up almost anyone can still get the food out). Most meals went without a hitch but at dinner we ran out of food. When Joe returned the following day I went to the kitchen to let him know that we were short for dinner the night before. Here is the following unheated and matter of fact exchange I heard between Chef Joe and the culinary student he put in charge on his day off:

Joe: "Were we short for dinner yesterday?"

Student: "Yes, Chef"

Joe: "Did you follow the production record?"

Student: "For the most part, Chef."

Joe: "Was the part you didn't follow the part where we ended up short?"

Student: "Yes, Chef."

Joe: "What did I tell you about production records?"

Student: "That they are gospel, Chef"

Joe: "As if they came from the mouth of God himself, right?"

Student: "Yes, Chef"

Joe: "What did you learn today?"

Student: "Always follow the production records, Chef."

Joe: "If you follow the production records and we come up short it's my fault. If you *don't* follow 'em and we come up short..."

Student: "My ass is yours, Chef?"

Joe: "Yes it is."

Joe (turning to me): "It won't happen again, Bear."

Bear: "Yes, Chef."

It didn't happen again that summer on Joe's days off. Notice that the religious theme got in there again. So, done right, with the right discipline in the kitchen, with production records a chef can actually take a day off and not worry about people being fed. Food for thought. Pardon the pun. Take care. I hope you are well. Things are going swimmingly here.

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