

LABOR & EMPLOYEES



ISTOCK

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How to Move Up in the Restaurant Industry

IT'S STILL POSSIBLE TO ADVANCE IN THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY—ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING SECTORS WITH A PROVEN TRACK RECORD OF INDIVIDUALS GOING FROM THE BOTTOM ALL THE WAY UP.

JUNE 2019 ▸ CARLY FISHER

Getting into the foodservice industry is easy; getting ahead is trickier. Whether you're 17 or 47, carving a long-term career path within the \$825 billion restaurant industry requires the right combination of drive, direction, and discipline to transition from the floor to the C-suite. Unlike other industries, foodservice remains one of the few sectors where it is still possible to move up the ladder without a formal education. In fact, nine out of 10 restaurant managers and eight out of 10 restaurant owners started their careers in entry-level positions, according to the National Restaurant Association.

"There's no one path to get there, which is the beauty of the hospitality industry—it's not an impossible thing," says Leslie Ferrier, vice president of human resources at Momofuku Group, which operates over a dozen concepts internationally. "You can get a job at McDonald's, work the counter, be a shift leader, grow into being a manager of that restaurant and then a regional manager, and eventually own your franchise."

Bonus: There's more than one way to move up and plenty of trajectories to explore. All hospitality recruiters interviewed agree that having restaurant experience is crucial above all else, and that most companies are thrilled to help a motivated employee gain skills in their expressed career track. A server who enjoys the human interaction of their job, for example, might have a future in human resources; a host that knows the ins and outs of social media could make the jump into marketing. It's up to the candidate to express the interest, put in the work, and make the connections to get what they want.

"It is difficult to find highly qualified leaders in the industry who know the industry and are well versed in all the frontline work that gets done, but also have some really good chops when it comes to working with budgets, TL reports [time and labor] and COGS [cost of goods sold]," says Susan Spikes, director of human resources at Quality Branded, a restaurant group with locations in New York, Denver, and Miami. "Additionally, depending on the size of the group, there's huge opportunity for people who have been in the industry, but are pursuing some other profession, such as IT professionals."

These are some of the most in-demand positions, but they only represent a handful of the growing number of specialized top-level positions to consider.

CEO: The **chief executive officer** is typically the head honcho role within a major chain of restaurants or a hospitality group, leading an executive team on the overall success of a business. That means working with a board of directors and overseeing high-level execution of everything, including: business strategy, branding and marketing, financing, human resources, sales, distribution, and quality control. These roles are often self-appointed in line with ownership or a founding stake in the company, but can occasionally move from within. Strong business acumen, senior management experience, and a holistic understanding of the moving parts necessary to make an operation succeed are the top qualities needed for this position.

- **Education:** MBA or bachelor's in hospitality and hotel management is helpful, but not necessarily required
- **Experience:** 15 years, with senior management roles in hospitality preferred
- **Typical trajectory:** Floor Manager » General Manager » Regional Manager » Director of Operations » CFO » Vice President » CEO

COO: The second-in-command to the CEO, the **chief operating officer** provides leadership for all business operations, administration, and company culture to ensure the sustainable growth of a restaurant or hospitality group. Where the CEO takes responsibility for the entire leadership team and direction of the company, the COO has more involvement with the day-to-day operations, such as implementing management standards, improving guest satisfaction and loyalty, and reviewing opportunities for concept scalability, particularly with multi-unit and franchise operations.

- **Education:** MBA or bachelor's in hospitality and hotel management is helpful, but not necessarily required
- **Experience:** 8 to 10 years in a senior-level operations role at a restaurant/hospitality group
- **Typical trajectory:** Floor Supervisor » General Manager » Hospitality or Service Director » Assistant Director of Operations » Director of Operations » VP of Development and Operations » COO

CFO: It's all about the money if you're a company's **chief financial officer**. This person oversees and executes the company's long-term accounting and finance strategies that include everything from cash flow, budgeting, financial reporting and analysis to risk management, tax compliance and real estate. Typically the CFO works in tandem with the executive leadership team to ensure the financial success of a business; serves as the conduit between banking institutions, real estate developers and lawyers; heads the financial team and implements tax and accounting policies.

- **Education:** MBA or CPA designation preferred; bachelor's in finance, accounting, business, economics, or related field
- **Experience:** 5 to 8 years in a senior management financial role. Preference given to those who have worked within the hospitality industry
- **Typical trajectory:** Staff Accountant » Senior Accountant » Corporate Comptroller » Director of Business Analysis » VP of Finance » CFO

CMO: Marketing, advertising, and brand management are in the wheelhouse of a **chief marketing officer**. Working with the CEO and executive leadership team, the CMO is responsible for creating initiatives to grow customer acquisition, revenue and sales through brand awareness marketing campaigns ranging from advertising and public relations to social media and influencer outreach programs.

- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in marketing or equivalent is typically required
- **Experience:** 5 or more years working in a director-level marketing position, preferably within restaurant/hospitality industry
- **Typical trajectory:** Social Media Coordinator or Junior Publicist » Senior Publicist » Director of Marketing » Vice President of Marketing » CMO

EC: One of the most visible and sought-after roles in the restaurant industry is an **executive chef**, which is the top-level culinary position within a restaurant group. The executive chef oversees the planning and management of menus, recipe development and plate presentation, management of kitchen staff, proper sanitation, purchasing specifications, operational and budget reports, and recommendations for the culinary direction of a restaurant or hospitality group.

- **Education required:** No formal education required, though culinary school is a plus
- **Experience required:** 7 to 8 years working in a culinary, back-of-the-house management role at a restaurant/foodservice operation
- **Typical trajectory:** Line Cook » Sous Chef » Executive Sous » Chef de Cuisine » Executive Chef

3 Ways To Get Ahead

Tips to get your foot in the door from HR professionals in the know.

- **Do some light stalking.** Tracking down the right people and making connections is essential for any career advancement, but particularly in the face-to-face business of hospitality. "There's a fine line between enthusiastic and a stalker; it's a balance," says Leslie Ferrier, vice president of human resources at Momofuku Group. "You can get an introduction through a third party, you can reach out through LinkedIn. You can go to a restaurant and while you're sitting there, ask, 'Who is your manager or operations director? Can I have your business card?' That's not hard to do. Our business is being face to face and giving them experiences."
- **Express yourself.** You can't get to the next level if no one knows that's what you're after. "Annual performance evaluations are a great opportunity to share your own dream," says Susan Spikes, director of human resources at Quality Branded. "I sit down with people and ask them what they want to do in three to five years. If I'm looking for an HR manager and they want to take over my position, that is my commitment to everybody; to teach you my job. If you're not working for a company that feels that way, test it out. It doesn't mean it's a bad company, but if there isn't room or they don't put a focus on that, find opportunities that can support your growth."
- **Put in the extra work and show up.** Most restaurants operate with tight margins, so offering to take on additional work or training opportunities will always get you noticed. "For those individuals who are interested in doing more and vocalize it, we try to expose them in different ways," says Kim Lewandowski, human resources director at Patachou, an Indianapolis-based restaurant group. "Either on-site training or shadowing, or our semi-annual retreat, which is a company-wide meeting, almost like a large training opportunity, that we open to our employees. And even from attendance, we can see this individual is attending something that isn't mandatory, there's some interest there."

Tools of the Trade

Want to move up outside your current operation? Check out these resources for landing your next gig.

- **Culinary Agents:** From independent fine-dining restaurants to corporate multi-unit operations, this specialized job board features hundreds of foodservice opportunities across more than 30 cities nationwide. | [culinaryagents.com](#)
- **Industry:** Kim Lewandowski, human resources director at Patachou, says their company has started listing their openings on this hospitality-centric job site, which features everything from floor positions to management-track roles. | [industry.co](#)
- **LinkedIn:** As one of the leading job sites on the internet, LinkedIn hardly needs an introduction. But it's a good place to start connecting directly with recruiters while scouting C-suite positions and specific roles within the hospitality industry. | [linkedin.com](#)
- **Glassdoor:** Glassdoor helps you look before you leap, with user-submitted reviews from current and former employees giving the rundown on company culture, upwards mobility, and even average salary information. | [glassdoor.com](#)
- **Hospitality Recruiters:** Let someone else do the work by submitting your resume to an experienced food and beverage executive recruitment agency like Kinsa Group, Gecko Hospitality, Goodwin Recruiting and others.

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FRANCHISING



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CHEF PROFILES



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BEVERAGE



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TECHNOLOGY



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CHAIN RESTAURANTS



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Genghis Grill Enters 2023 with Momentum, Sights Set on Growth

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Experiences Over Reviews: How Restaurants Can Engage Diners Authentically

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KITCHEN EQUIPMENT



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FINANCE

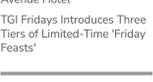


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DELIVERY



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RESTAURANT DESIGN

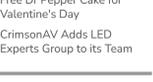


Using Glass Art to Upgrade Your Restaurant's Look

Philadelphia's First Hospitality to Debut Its Glu Food Hall

How a Midwestern Chef Drives Innovation at Nostalgic Concepts

CONSUMER TRENDS

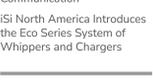


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The State of Restaurants in 2023

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