

# New Year, New You: A Recipe for Continued Success

CULINARY CONNECTION



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As each year comes to an end, many people spend some time in reflection, and also in anticipation of the year ahead. We typically reflect on the successes, failures, struggles, and victories of the past 12 months. We approach the new year with a vigor fueled by plans to eat better, exercise more, practice gratitude, or whatever that “resolution” looks like to you.

As a certified dietary manager, chef, or dietitian in a non-commercial setting, we need to remember in our new year planning that we are held to professional standards both internally (from our department, organization, clients, etc.), as well as externally (from

CMS, FDA, HHS, etc.) with regards to current science, nutrition, and trends. What this looks like from facility to facility may differ drastically, but one certainty is that if you don’t take a similar approach as you do with your resolutions, you are ultimately doing a disservice to those in your sphere of influence.

As a working executive chef and consultant, I approach each year virtually the same way and want to share that approach (that’s been fairly successful) with you. This template is a “Recipe for Success” that you can take today, apply to several areas of your operation and life, and be better equipped moving forward to not only survive, but

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**Rocky Dunnam, CEC, WCEC, CCA, CDM, CFPP** is Executive Chef for FoodService Partners, Elizabeth Jane Bivins Culinary Center, NINETEEN49 Catering, and Rock'D Recipes in Amarillo, Texas.

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thrive. The recipe is so simple that it contains just four steps, much like the recipe for the most classic of salad dressings: vinaigrette.

In a vinaigrette recipe we add one-part vinegar (Step 1), with any seasoning/flavoring (Step 2), then add an emulsifier like egg yolk, mustard, honey, or lecithin (Step 3), and finally stream in three-parts oil while constantly whisking to fully incorporate all ingredients into our final, delicious vinaigrette (Step 4). And like most basic recipes, it's only when you focus on the quality of the ingredients, the accuracy of the method, and then the consistency and flavor of the final product that you will achieve a truly successful creation.

## A RECIPE FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS

### Ingredients:

- Previous Data
- Current Knowledge/Trends
- Traceability/Forecasting

### Procedure:

#### STEP 1: Analyze Previous Data

The first thing I always do when planning into the next year is to analyze or simply reflect on the previous year. This can be as in-depth as

reviewing meeting minutes, notes, charts, and detailed graphs of cause-and-effect related to nutrition and food service. It can also be as easy as asking straightforward questions to our clients or residents such as *"What would you like to see more or less of on the menu?"*

This process starts for me in early October, but only because last year I set myself up for a successful 2018. Some individuals may need to begin planning today for a more successful 2020. Don't let that sound daunting, because just like the vinaigrette, once you've done it a time or two you'll be able to master it with little effort.

Some of the ongoing data points I like to have in place are easily reviewable, like comment cards. I can spend 20 minutes entering them into a spreadsheet each week, and then review the data monthly/quarterly/yearly. There are also highlighted notes from both department and resident council meetings. Then there are highlighted notes from articles and publications that I've read throughout the year that directly impact my profession. I recommend ANFP's Edge and Edge Express, ACF's The National Culinary Review, and publications

from Pioneer Network. I also benefit from about a dozen email lists from various organizations. By having this material on hand, it's easier to develop a firm foundation on which to build the remainder of this recipe. Consider this the base—or the vinegar—of our vinaigrette!

#### STEP 2: Add Current Knowledge and Trends

Now that we have a solid base for our Recipe for Continued Success, we can begin to add some flavor and seasoning. This step will look different from year-to-year and even from facility-to-facility, due to variable factors like geographic location, ethnic diversity, budget, etc. What is not a variable, but is in fact a constant, is that seasoning and flavor are required. If we approach each new year the same way we did the last year (or the previous five years) we will inevitably develop a culture and menu that is stagnant and bland.

Here we want to draw from our network of colleagues and friends, as well as from the vast amount of information that's easily accessible at our fingertips. Look at forecasted trends, current scientific publications, and learn from

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the mistakes or misfortune of others (like the 20 outbreaks of E. coli that were linked to romaine lettuce in 2018). Then determine how to incorporate some of these trends and this new information in your operation, while taking care to avoid the negative outcomes from the previous year, if possible.

Examples of this might include looking at nutritional data on butter vs. margarine and then at all recipes that contain margarine (or similar “butter-like” substances) and replacing with actual butter. Or maybe exploring one of the most exciting current trends and substituting the steamed white rice on your menu with quinoa or an ancient grain like farro or spelt. And one that’s almost a no-brainer for me in 2019 is replacing romaine lettuce on our new menus with a less “controversial” substitute, like iceberg lettuce or field greens.

### STEP 3: Add a Safety Component

You can’t just build a vinaigrette with vinegar, seasoning, and oil. If you do, as soon as you leave it alone it will break or separate. Likewise, you can’t build a successful new year without an “emulsifier,” or a safety component that will keep your recipe from breaking apart. Start with a small check that will allow you to frequently assess and even measure your plan’s progression. If you plan to add a trendy item to your menu, maybe include a comment card and request client feedback on the day that item is served. This will give you real-time information that will allow you to make adjustments if necessary before your whole plan breaks like bad vinaigrette. Or maybe even create a list of questions addressing those changes and/or the plan itself, and bring it up in a meeting with residents.

### STEP 4: Streamline the Process

We’ve already got a great base, we’ve added some flavor and seasoning, our emulsifier will keep the whole thing from breaking down, and now we need to incorporate the final ingredient. Here is where we stream in the “oil” of our Recipe for Success in the new year. Like vinaigrette, this is the largest part of the recipe (about two-thirds of the total). It’s one thing to make a great plan, and yet another entirely to follow through with its traceability and begin to forecast the next move. This is where I set up the traceability in small, easy steps that will compile over the next 10 or so months and provide me with the first ingredient (see Step 1) for preparing for next year. I’ll document the changes in

menu, like substituting farro for white rice, and plan a strategy to trace that change throughout the menu cycle. I’ll also train staff on proper cooking technique and strategies for implementing the changes, as well as ensuring the consistency thereafter. I’ll even take this step a bit further by enlisting key staff members to take the new project under their wing and ensure its success. Empowering your staff to succeed is a great topic for another day, but applies here much the same as empowering your staff to make that vinaigrette correctly.

### REWARDS OF A WELL-EXECUTED RECIPE

And just like that, you have created a very tangible Recipe for Continued Success. Much like a New Year’s resolution, it can be either very successful or a misfire. That’s up to you! As a leader of your operation you must be a thinker. This means that you must internally (in your department) reflect on the past year’s victories and failures, plan improvement, and set yourself and your department up to excel moving forward.

The great thing about this recipe though is that it’s applicable at any moment. If you decide you need something to change now and can’t wait until the year’s end, you can! Just refer back to these four easy steps and prepare your Recipe for Continued Success right now. **E**

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### CE Questions: Culinary Connection



*This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.*

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*No payment information is required for ANFP members through March 12, 2019.*

- How many steps is the "Recipe for Continued Success"?
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
- What is *not* part of Step 1: Analyze Previous Data?
  - Review meeting notes from the previous year
  - Factor in the number of years you've been in your current role
  - Ask your current staff/residents for feedback
- What is *not* part of Step 2: Add Current Knowledge and Trends?
  - Disregard feedback if you've read ACF's The National Culinary Review
  - You must add some flavor (new, exciting items) to your menu
  - Consider recent nutritional data in support of menu changes
- What is *not* part of Step 3: Add a Safety Component?
  - Measure your plan's progression often
  - Consider utilizing a comment card with residents/clients for feedback
  - Post a "Stay Out" sign on your dumpster
- What is *not* part of Step 4: Streamline the Process?
  - Build efficiencies on your solid base
  - Don't worry, it's only a small step in the process
  - Train your staff and retrain if necessary
- What variables do we have to look at when determining what trends to utilize?
  - Demographics
  - Availability of product
  - Both of the above
- Is it too late now to implement this Recipe for Continued Success in 2019?
  - No, let's set up for success today!
  - Yes, we are already a couple months into the new year
  - Maybe, it's a lot of work

