STAR Questions

1. Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.

Situation:

When I was a cook at Bardenay I worked with young man named Avery. He was pretty much to antithesis of I am, whether it was in regards to work ethic, attitude dealing with stress, etc.. I had to work with in a couple of feet of him for months simply because we worked adjacent cooking stations on the line, not being near him was not an option.

Task:

Since I was the lead line cook, I not only had to work next him but I had to lead him, delegate work to him and trust him enough to do it. When you are tasked with leading people, you have to put personal feelings aside which I found difficult.

Action:

There was no one specific thing I did to handle this situation but rather adopting a new attitude in regards to many little things he did or more often, what he didn’t do. When he plated dishes that weren’t up to our standards I didn’t disparage him but instead would show him how I would do it. I would also encourage him on little things he did right. Basically I chose to lead by example with regards to work ethic and attitude.

Results:

Unfortunately everything I tried with Avery ultimately didn’t work out, he eventually quit. Yet my efforts weren’t wasted, they had a positive impact on the rest of the cooks I worked with. They were all pretty annoyed by the extra work they had to do in his wake but they started complaining less and less. There was an overall better morale in the kitchen.

2. Describe a time when you had to step up and demonstrate leadership skills

Situation:

When I was working as a cook in Denver at The Highland Tavern, two of the cooks under me got in a physical altercation while taking a smoke a break. While no punches were thrown, there was aggressive shoving involved. Luckily one of our bartenders was outside to intervene before it could escalate.

Task:

Being the lead cook, I had to make an immediate decision that was in the best interest of the restaurant and all the other employees. I sent them both home immediately and called the owner so he could decide whether or not to involve the police.

Action:

I had to pull two prep cooks off their food prep duties to assist on the line because I was now very short handed in terms of manpower. I couldn’t ask these two prep cooks to stay late to finish their prep duties because they were both scheduled for morning prep shifts. Instead I stayed late and finished their prep duties and thanked them profusely for going above and beyond their assigned roles and stepping into a more stressful role.

Result:

Ultimately the two cooks who got in an altercation where suspended for a month with out pay, no charges were pressed. The owner came in the day after the altercation to thank me personally for how I handled the situation

3. Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?

Situation:

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When first I cooked the at the Yardhouse, it was a family owned restaurant that made all the dishes from scratch. During my tenure Darden, a very large restaurant group, bought the Yardhouse from the family that owned it. Almost overnight, I witnessed a the made everything from the ground up be transformed into one that used heavily processed and premade products. As a cook who believed in making quality food, I found this very distressing.

Task:

I found myself faced with the reality of not only having to stomach a dramatic decrease in food quality but also having to adopt entirely new procedures for nearly every recipe because they had changed dramatically. This was a big undertaking since we had nearly two hundred menu items.

Action:

I chose to take this as a personal challenge because I wasn’t employed to do things my way, I was employed to do it their way. I adjusted my mindset to accept that not every restaurant optimizes for the same thing. Some restaurants optimize for food quality above all else, often at the expense of profit. Darden did not abide by such a model. After accepting things were different, I worked quite hard to learn their methodology as fast I could. I even studied the new procedures for recipes on flash cards to drive the understanding home as thoroughly as possible.

Result:

Since I had made the adjustments I did, I was able to transition into a new way of doing things rather quickly. Though they were not my preferred way of doing things, this made a more resilient and adaptable employee.

4. Tell me about a time when you worked under either extremely close supervision of extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that?

Situation:

When I first started as a sous chef at Colorado Plus Cidery, my Chef Vanessa was the epitome of a micromanager. She would correct everything I did, especially when it wasn’t necessary. It constantly felt like a negative vote on my competencies as a cook.

Task:

This wasn’t the sort of dilemma that requires can be solved by one specific course of action. I had to learn her expectations and not just meet them but exceed them. I needed to take her criticisms and scrutiny with equanimity.

Action:

I did everything I could to make myself a model employee to demonstrate I respected her experience and wanted to learn from her. I showed up early every shift, asked for her insight on a variety of dishes and cooking techniques. I took all criticisms as a chance to improve.

Result:

After behaving this way for a couple of months, she naturally eased off the micro management. She had grown to trust that I could perform the job without close supervision, make decisions in her absence since I had an intimate sense of how she wanted things done.

5. Give me an example of a time you were able to be creative with your work. What was exciting of difficult about it?

Situation:

When I was the Sous Chef at Colorado Plus Cidery, I was in charge of creating a weekly vegetarian special for rather discriminating clientele. This was especially demanding because many of our guests were regular so I had to wait months before I could reuse a special I had previously which meant I had to push myself to vary my techniques and flavor profiles. On top of that, I could only use locally sourced ingredients.

Task:

On top of my duties as a Sous Chef, I had to spend my free time writing and experimenting with new recipes. I had to teach myself how to coax as much flavor out of vegetables as possible which, being someone who eats meat with every meal, found this to be quite alien and challenging.

Action:

I would study various cookbooks and recipes I found online to find inspiration. I would then proceed to make practice dishes early in my work shifts while the restaurant was relatively slow. As time went on I became more comfortable by experimenting with new dishes and the vulnerability that came with putting your creation up for judgement.

Result:

Initially my specials were simply ok, nothing to write home about. Before long they started to receive praise from customers and eventually regulars would come in asking when I was planning on my making a specific special again. This endeavor was extremely rewarding when it was well received and I grew to look forward to developing new specials.

Elevator Pitch Summary:

I come from a culinary background, which exposed me to a variety of experiences and developed a broad host skills that have unexpectedly prepared me for a transition to software development. It taught me adaptability and perseverance when faced by challenge after challenge. Once I discovered a spark for programming, I used these traits to strive to learn new languages and tackle complex projects. I am now oriented towards learning on a perpetual basis, excited by the prospect of developing my skills as programmer so I can bring value to a software industry writ large.

Five Interview Questions:

1. What does it take to be successful here?

2. What are the top skill and traits you’re targeting for this position?

3. What would success look like in the first 90 days?

4. What’s the most challenging aspect of the role?

5. How fast is the company growing?

Whiteboard challenges:

I didn’t participate in any whiteboard challenges for this assignment with any peers from the cohort but I did practice two problems in front of my roommate. The first challenge was one where you had to mimic the left shift operation with two integers and return the answer. The second challenge was checking if one array can be nested inside of another. The experience let me know that I need to keep practicing at whiteboards, I found my mind going blank at points while trying to present. Also my presentation process itself needs some work, such as maintaining eye contact while presenting.