

# FSR

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## Chef Roles Expand Into HR



AT EASTERN STANDARD GROUP, MOLLY HOPPER-SANDROF, DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, KNEW HER EXPERIENCE WAS PERFECT FOR HIRING FRONT-OF-HOUSE STAFF, BUT FOR THE KITCHEN SHE HELPED DEFINE A ROLE THAT IS PART CHEF, PART HR.

It's no secret that staffing challenges are one of the biggest problems for chefs and restaurant owners nationwide. According to a report from the National Restaurant Association, one in four restaurant operators say they have difficulty filling job openings. Couple this with the fact that hospitality employee turnover was over 70 percent in 2015 and it's easy to see why owners and operators are worried. Both independents and chain restaurants are using incentives like stipends for student loans and hiring bonuses to attract and retain talent.

At Eastern Standard Group in Boston, upper-level management is deploying a different approach and adding a new

role to its team to decrease employee turnover and create a more attractive work environment. "We have to reinvent the way we hire, train, and treat culinary staff," says Molly Hopper-Sandrof, director of people and staff development for the Eastern Standard Group. She is responsible for human resources at the group's six properties, which employ a total of 500 people. When thinking about the culinary hiring goals for the company, she considered her personal experiences in a restaurant and her background working in front-of-house roles throughout college.

"I've never actually been a cook," she says. Because of this, Hopper-Sandrof realizes she is at a disadvantage when

thinking about the needs and wants of her culinary staff. "When you're working with chefs, there's a lingo that you need to speak," she explains. "I couldn't relate to what a line cook or a sous chef might need, and in order for us to become a more attractive place and more innovative, we need to be able to use that lingo."

Hopper-Sandrof and the management team at Eastern Standard Group created a new role in the company that's part chef and part human resources to bridge the gap between the HR and culinary worlds.

In order to prepare for this new position in the company, the team worked to refine exactly what it would entail and what the existing staff could gain.



EASTERN STANDARD

**THE SIX PROPERTIES IN THE EASTERN STANDARD GROUP EMPLOY A TOTAL OF 500 PEOPLE IN THEIR RESTAURANTS.**

“When our team decided to create this new role within our HR department, we thought having someone with restaurant chef experience would be extremely valuable for our ongoing staffing needs,” says Andrew Holden, general manager of Eastern Standard and proprietor of the group’s newest property, Branch Line. Training for the position includes three weeks of back-of-the house training across the group’s six restaurant locations. “A firsthand understanding of the kitchen provides great insights in terms of the skills and traits needed to be successful in our restaurants and the opportunities cooking staff should be afforded for continued growth,” he adds.

In July of this year, the company found a former chef to fill the role, and Hopper-Sandrof says her staff has responded favorably. Looking ahead, she anticipates the role will vary depending on what the staff needs. “He’ll be filling out worker’s comp, but can also walk into a kitchen and show an intern how to chop chives or if it’s busy he can do expo,” she says. The fact that the chef is also bilingual is an asset that can be applied across all departments.

For Hopper-Sandrof, the role is really about “being an advocate” for cooks and creating less of a division between front of the house and back of the house, which is a good step for everyone. “I don’t want to be overconfident, but I think any steps that a restaurant can take to improve quality of life for its back-of-house [team] is a great step.” ■