

Get paid to cater!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Caterer**



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1. Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to become a caterer! You've chosen a career that's fun, rewarding, and offers you plenty of opportunities for professional development and personal growth.

Your interest in starting a catering company probably stems from your own day-to-day experience with, and joy of, feeding people. Chances are you enjoy every step of the process, from finding the perfect recipe and purchasing the freshest ingredients, to matching each course with the most suitable wine.

You appreciate the texture of foods, revel in their individual flavors and aromas, and love adjusting your favorite recipes to make them uniquely your own. You may be crazy about spices, and you can happily spend hours browsing grocery store aisles, looking for new treasures. Best

of all, you love the raves that come your way from appreciative relatives and guests who say things like, “You should be in the catering business!”

Cooking is both an art and a skill. Knowing how to follow a recipe, and then develop it to suit the occasion and feed a crowd, takes skill. But knowing how to present food so that it is also a feast for the eyes, and mastering the split-second timing that makes your vegetables crisp and colorful, and your salad cold and fresh — that’s the art of cooking. And both are the stock-in-trade of successful caterers.

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Caterer* gives you the information you need to get started and succeed in this fun and fulfilling career. You’ll learn how to sharpen your skills and develop the creative touches that make catering both rewarding and profitable. And you’ll learn some tricks of the trade from top caterers.

1.1 A Career in Catering

People hire caterers to supply food, beverages, and often service for special events or gatherings.

Until recently, the only time most people considered hiring a caterer was for weddings. But with the growing popularity of chefs and home-entertaining gurus like Rachael Ray, Paula Deen, Emeril Lagasse, and Mario Batali, hiring a caterer to provide extraordinary food for all types of private functions has become a much more common practice.

Nowadays, caterers are hired to serve anything and everything from a romantic dinner for two to a business luncheon to a political convention with hundreds or even thousands of attendees. A smart (and busy) caterer will offer menus to satisfy a broad range of occasions and styles, including a formal dinner, casual buffet, outdoor picnic lunch, clam-bake on the beach, luau, and maybe even an ethnic specialty.

1.1.1 A Caterer’s Role

A caterer’s prime role in the planning and execution of public or private events is to prepare food, transport it to the function site, and serve it, possibly with the assistance of paid helpers and waitstaff.

In addition, a caterer may be asked to provide advice regarding food and beverage selection, construct menus around specific themes, or work in tandem with other function coordinators — such as wedding consultants, corporate event planners, or banquet hall managers — as well as the paying client.

Regardless of the purpose or size of the event, clients pay for the convenience, experience, and professionalism that caterers offer. Once they sign a service contract and put down a deposit, they expect you, the caterer, to deal with all the details of food and beverage service that go into making a function successful and stress-free for the host.

Among a caterer's most vital missions — and the one that will sink business in a heartbeat if it's ignored — is to provide food that is prepared, handled, stored, transported, and served in strict compliance with food safety rules and regulations. This important issue is addressed throughout this guide.

1.1.2 Types of Catering Services

Caterers provide a variety of services for a varying number of guests. There are three basic types of service that we will discuss in this guide:

Full-service Catering

Full-service caterers can accommodate any number of guests for any type of event. They range from the “meat and potatoes” caterers that offer standard fare at prices ranging from budget to elite, to creative cuisine for discriminating palates, usually with a price tag to match.

Custom Catering

Today, a growing number of caterers are choosing to find a profitable specialization or “niche” rather than offering a whole gamut of conventional menu items and services. If you're one of those people yearning for a more adventurous approach to cooking and serving food, custom catering gives you the opportunity to be creative and to specialize in some style of food or service that isn't typically offered by full-service caterers. For example, you might choose to specialize in organic food, a particular ethnic cuisine, or fine dining.

Custom catering is an ideal business choice for caterers who do not own or rent a kitchen on a full-time basis. And, it's a good way to break into catering, as events tend to be smaller and clients take a more active role in working with the caterer. Clients are also typically willing to take more chances in order to “wow” their guests.

Corporate Catering

Corporate catering — catering events such as business breakfasts, lunches, meetings, dinners, conventions, picnics, and receptions — for large or small companies can be the staple of a caterer's business. In section 3.1 you'll find out more about this profitable specialization.

1.2 Benefits of Being a Caterer

By deciding to be a caterer, you're choosing a career loaded with benefits. They include:

Being Part of a Growth Industry

Like most industries, catering took its share of hard knocks during the recent economic downturn. Nonetheless, there are still thousands of catered events taking place throughout North America every day. As long as couples get married, people celebrate landmark birthdays and anniversaries, and corporations host annual parties and conferences, caterers will continue to be in demand.

With thousands of catered events taking place throughout North America every day, there is no shortage of work for top-notch caterers. According to *Catersource* magazine, catering is a \$6 billion industry, and one of the fastest-growing food service segments in the U.S.

Much faster than average growth is also expected among those who work in retail catering, preparing foods for shoppers to take home for both their entertaining and family meal-planning needs.

Freedom

When you work for yourself in your own catering business, you control the amount of time you work. You're free to accept jobs that appeal to you and turn down those that don't, or that put too great a burden on

you. As your own boss, you will be adding immeasurably to your own quality of life.

“The business is more fun than you can imagine. It is more satisfying than you can imagine. It is more work than you can imagine. I wish someone had told me that sometimes you need to say “no” and walk away from a piece of business. Learn to trust your instincts.”

— Donna Maguire, *Instructor, Hospitality Management, Culinary Arts & Food Science, Drexel University*

Rewarding Work

Not only is catering enjoyable and often downright fun, it also gives you the opportunity for personal growth as you develop and hone your skills. And there’s the sense of validation you get every time you thrill a client.

In time, you might decide to specialize in a particular culinary style, or to focus on intimate at-home dinner parties or on large corporate events. Whatever direction you choose, you’ll enjoy plenty of variety. Each job is different; each client’s needs vary. That means that you’ll finish every job with a little more experience, and the pleasure of knowing you successfully rose to a new challenge.

“The most rewarding aspect without a doubt is seeing the looks on my clients’ faces when a dish is presented, and then again right after the first bite. That is my validation as a chef.”

— Alexei Boldireff, *In Your Kitchen Catering, Edmonton, Alberta*

Meeting Important People

It’s a fact that everyone needs to eat. It’s also a fact that we show esteem and respect for our honored guests largely by how and what we feed them. For some, the more lavish, the better. But for others, their performance, or even their very career, hinges upon what they eat, when they eat, and how much they eat.

Feeding the famous can help a caterer go from virtual anonymity to being in demand. Mark McDaniel, owner and executive chef of ReMARK-able Affairs Catering in Dallas, says that “serving various heads of state

and Olympic athletes at the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City” was not only a highlight of his career, but helped to further solidify a career that he has assiduously nurtured through networking and keeping up with market trends.

Creative Opportunities

If you love to cook, you probably see pots and pans as palettes from which you, the artist, create edible works of art with ingredients of every hue and texture. The ability to turn ordinary foods into a pleasing meal that appeals to every sense is one of the attributes clients value most in a caterer. Opportunities to exercise your creativity abound in this career. And the skill to do so will set you apart as an expert in your field. Your creativity plays out in a very personal way, as it enhances landmark occasions in clients’ lives and becomes part of lasting memories and family history.

“The most rewarding aspect to me is being an important part of the special days people celebrate – whether it’s an engagement, wedding, milestone birthday, anniversary, or even the commemoration of life at a funeral luncheon. My goal is to create a truly memorable celebration. As far as I’m concerned, that’s the reason I keep doing this.”

— *Gisele Perez, Chef/Proprietor,
Small Pleasures Catering, Los Angeles*

Helping People

Not only will you come into contact with hundreds of people each year (sometimes at a single event!), but you will also have the satisfaction of knowing you’re providing a service that makes an event worry-free for your clients, and enables them to enjoy themselves. You’ll use your expertise and experience to help clients navigate the multitude of choices and decisions they’ll need to make in preparation for their once-in-a-lifetime event. And because they’re so grateful to you for “thinking of everything,” chances are excellent they’ll enthusiastically refer others to you.

“I like making people happy, and I try to do this through food. I love the process of working with a bride for up to two years and then seeing her be thrilled with the day of her dreams.”

— *Jeffrey S. Muldrow, Va Pensiero Restaurant,
Evanston, IL*

Income

As with any career, income levels depend on your experience, geographic location, size and scale of your business, and target customer base. But you can certainly expect to make a decent living at it. Full-time caterers routinely earn anywhere from \$30,000 to \$100,000 per year, with some earning considerably more.

People love to celebrate, and opportunities for celebration abound. The most unusual celebration I was ever asked to cater was the “I Heart My Kid” celebration for a young man who underwent an emergency heart transplant and not only survived, but is writing a book about his experience. Just remember that whenever you pick up the phone or respond to an email inquiry, you truly have no idea who and what opportunity waits at the other end. But chances are they will help your business — and your confidence — to grow.

1.3 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Caterer* is arranged to take you in a step-by-step manner through getting started and succeeding as a caterer. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2 will give you helpful information on *Getting Ready* so you can succeed in this career. You will find resources for enhancing your interpersonal skills, professional skills, organizational ability, and creativity. You will also learn how to find out about job openings and how to prepare an effective resume and cover letter. This chapter also covers the best resources for learning about catering, and explains how to get experience.

In Chapter 3, you will find good advice on *Starting Your Catering Business*. Here you will find practical information such as the best resources for setting up your business. You will also learn vital information, such as how to write a business plan, how to get start-up financing, how to market your services and attract clients, and how to hire and work with support staff. You will also find valuable advice on working with vendors — companies that supply the products and services you will need to run your catering business.

Chapter 4, *Running Your Catering Business*, explains the different services caterers provide and covers how to cater an event. In this chapter you will learn how to do a client consultation, and how to plan menus, accommodate special food requests, develop a work plan and schedule, prepare and deliver a catering order, and clean up at the end of an event.

Chapter 5 will give you strategies for *Getting Clients* through effective marketing tools and techniques, with scripts and advice on how to sell your services.

When you're finished with this guide you will know what step to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as a Caterer!

You have reached the end of the free sample of the *FabJob Guide to Become a Caterer*. To order and download the complete guide go to <https://www.iapcollege.com/program/caterer-course/>