

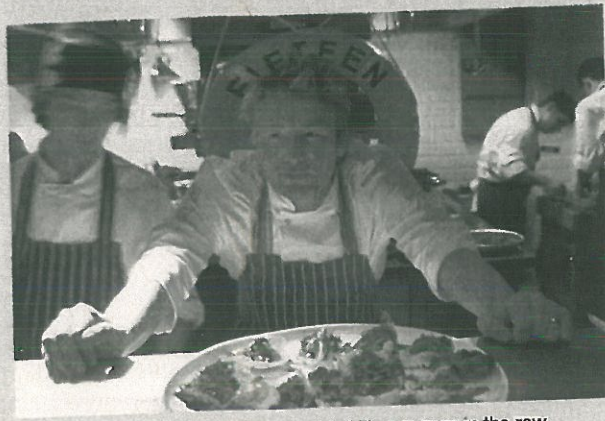
PART 4 CASE STUDY

Jamie Oliver: The Naked Manager?

It would seem that the British are media food junkies. The last decade has seen an apparently unstoppable growth in the number and type of television shows (generally with accompanying recipe books) by and about celebrity chefs. Scarcely any weekend newspaper is complete without its food and cookery section, and almost every possible type of cuisine and food-related angle is covered from domestic goddess to obsessive restaurateur, from food technologist to wilderness survivalist. Websites abound, and there are heated discussions about the quality and ethical provenance of our food. And yet, despite this obsession with reading about it, the British generally don't seem to like cooking and show very limited concern about the quality of what they, and perhaps more importantly their children, actually eat.¹ The catering industry remains one dominated by low pay, stressful working conditions and very limited prestige. Jamie Oliver (christened the 'Naked Chef' in an early series) is a British celebrity chef, and one who has spent his whole career in kitchens, albeit occasionally kitchens full of camera crew. In 2005 he became a campaigner for the provision of better-quality food in British schools after a startling series on Channel 4, *Jamie's School Dinners*.² This was followed in 2008 by a further attempt to get the British public weaned off ready meals and fast food through his 'Ministry of Food' initiative. But his approach to the recruitment, training and motivation of the first group of 15 young people to work in his new London restaurant gives a lively example of effective, if sometimes unconventional, managerial behaviour.

Jamie's kitchen: the project

Jamie himself went into the catering business at 16 after leaving school with no qualifications. His 2002 attempt to inspire some similarly unqualified young people to launch themselves into a career as chefs was followed by a Channel 4 documentary team.³ The scheme itself was ambitious and required Jamie to fulfil several roles, first being the entrepreneur, as he was investing a substantial amount of his own money in the creation of a new restaurant (to be named 'Fifteen' for the 15 trainees who would work there). Secondly, he was the professional chef at the heart of the enterprise and his name, reputation and style of cooking would provide the basis of the business. And finally, he became a very public manager of people. The series shows his involvement in the recruitment and selection



Source: Myung Jung Kim/PA Archives/Press Association Images

In the heat of the kitchen, managerial skills are seen in the raw. Jamie Oliver shows how good management can encourage personal achievement as well as business success.

of the trainees, and his contributions to the design of the overall training programme which was in part sponsored by the UK government under the New Deal initiative, but also heavily reliant on Jamie's contacts in the industry to obtain access to work experience placements in some of London's top restaurants. It also shows him monitoring the trainees' development and follows his attempts to inspire and motivate them to achieve standards of performance which would match his own professional reputation and make the business successful. In other words, the series records a microcosm of management in a highly competitive and pressured business context.

Jamie's management style

The Oliver image is that of a tousled, cheeky but hugely enthusiastic cockney lad-made-good; and at a boyish 28 when the series was shot, not perhaps the stereotypical manager. The events of the series, however, show him very clearly in a managerial role, and some of the incidents illustrate significant managerial skill. Some of his trainees are what would generally be classed as 'difficult' staff; they are unskilled, at times some of them are seriously de-motivated and disruptive, and none of them has had successful experience of holding down a permanent job. What are the key components of Oliver's managerial approach to the trainees?

Vision

There is no doubt that Oliver has a very clear vision of what the business itself should be. His particular style

of cooking is based around fresh ingredients, and he has an almost evangelical enthusiasm for the authenticity of produce and its 'traceability' (he emphasises the importance of knowing exactly where things come from, and building long-term relationships with growers and suppliers who share his values). He takes the trainees, many of whom have never really thought about the source of raw ingredients, on field visits to suppliers, farms and markets in order to communicate this vision. He has an equally clear goal, and one which is much harder to reach, of helping unemployed and unskilled people to launch themselves into a career as chefs. This is the people side of the vision:

It's about training unemployed people to a really professional level. I want them to be employable.⁴

The early episodes of the series show the recruitment of the initial fifteen potential trainees. A high profile, media-friendly project such as this attracted large numbers of applicants; but the selection process could not be based on more usual criteria such as knowledge, skills or experience since the whole purpose of the project was to offer opportunities for training to young people without these things. Instead, the selectors had to gauge potential and trainability, so a series of tests were constructed as a form of assessment centre, each stage taking place within a few days. At an open day, all applicants were asked to talk about food on camera; the purpose was to identify what Jamie considered an essential quality, enthusiasm or passion about food. The initial shortlist was largely based on these recordings. The next stage was an elimination day when the 60 chosen candidates were put through a 'taste test'. Jamie and three fellow chefs prepared two items for the candidates to taste: a butternut squash ravioli, and a tempura fried oyster. He deliberately chose items which he believed the candidates would not have tasted before, then challenged them to describe what they were eating in terms of textures and flavours. This was designed to find out how well candidates could use important sensory information. Very few were able to go beyond 'like' or 'don't like' and do what he asked, even when prompted. Students were then discussed and the four selectors finally agreed on 30 who would be put forward for a second test. This was a more detailed attempt to assess their ability to observe the method of preparing a simple dish of fried salmon and mixed vegetables, and then reproduce it in the kitchen. Having demonstrated and explained all the elements of the process, Jamie and the assessors were concerned to see how observant the candidates were, and also to watch the degree to which they took control of the process and reacted to the way the food was cooking. As they worked, the observers questioned them about what they were doing, often prompting them to remember the details of the process. The final selection was made on

the basis of their approach to the work as much as on the quality of the finished dish.

Having recruited the trainees, Jamie participated in the training process. The trainees received instruction in basic skills at college, but as they progressed he began the attempt to shape them to the needs of his particular style and the standards which would be necessary in the restaurant. This involved classes and demonstrations followed by practical activity (for instance, in bread making) which additionally gave him the opportunity to pay detailed attention to each individual's ability to do the job. As the trainees began to realise the amount of work and mental effort which is involved in being a chef, some of them became de-motivated and failed to attend college. His approach to the weaker students was personal and supportive; he talked to them individually, paid for travel expenses to ensure they could attend college on time, and even visited some of them at home to discuss their problems. But he expected them to respond and so he also gave them some tough assignments to check their commitment. At one stage he sent them to work the night shift in a bakery for a week, a shift which he shared with them and used as a way to observe their growing skill and determination. Additionally, he was concerned to create a strong team spirit because of the importance of co-operation in a commercial kitchen environment. He took the group to spend a week camping (and of course catering for themselves as a group) on a Cumbrian farm, where they got to know about the business of livestock farming and observe first hand how to evaluate the quality of meat. This too would be important in the restaurant; chefs are responsible for ordering, and checking and assessing the quality of the goods being delivered. They also learned how to make sausages, including a chance to experiment and design their own.

Technical knowledge and understanding

As a chef, Oliver is both trained and experienced. His technical knowledge and ability is very important to the whole enterprise, as it provides him with part of his credibility amongst the young trainees as well as forming the basis for much of their training. The series shows him demonstrating basic techniques such as cutting and food preparation, as well as devising menus and improvising his way around the occasional disaster experienced by the trainees. The second half of Episode 5 shows Oliver putting the trainees together in a kitchen for the first time, with the task of cooking a set menu for 50 guests. He watches them carefully during prep (the hours prior to service), coaching individuals in the application of simple techniques they are learning at college, but which they forget under pressure: which knife to use for vegetables, how to shave parmesan, not to waste egg whites, even how to boil water efficiently to cook pasta to time. He then supervises with growing

horror as service continues and many of the trainees fail to cope, but at the same time observing and praising those who are doing well, or who ask for the help they need to get things right. The orders pile up, some of the trainees become confused and prepare partial orders rather than complete ones, others forget key components so that dishes have to be sent back and re-done, and the time they take to prepare the main course runs to over 45 minutes. One or two become increasingly bad-tempered which causes them to make further mistakes; they argue with Jamie and waste more time. As the whole project descends into chaos, Oliver calls a halt; it was in fact only a simulation and there are no guests in the restaurant. However, the point of this training exercise was to create a real sense of urgency and not only to give the trainees a chance to practice their recently acquired technical skills, but also to give them a sense of the importance of teamwork. It underlined the need to stay calm under pressure, to concentrate on what they are doing and achieve the standards required and, most importantly for their future careers, to show respect for the chef. It is an important lesson for them to learn because the working culture of a restaurant kitchen is one of absolute respect and obedience; perhaps because the work is fast, dangerous in itself and potentially harmful to customers in a way which can cause a business to fold overnight.

Delegation and standards

Whilst he is very 'hands-on' in the management of the kitchen side of the enterprise, the series also shows that Jamie knows he can't do it all. The business side of the project involves accountants, project managers and builders, and the frustrations and problems involved in the actual creation of the premises clearly give Oliver serious headaches. We see the building project going over budget, and experience technical delays and setbacks; and at times it looks as if it will fail to hit schedule or even open at all. Oliver's personality often appears to be the only thing which keeps the project running, and he is not afraid to make unusual demands on his team to achieve the objective (he takes a similarly demanding approach with some of the school dinner ladies in the *Jamie's School Dinners* series). This is, in part, a reflection of the standards which he sets both by example and in his interactions with other professional members of the team and, indeed, with the trainees. However, he also knows he is a hard taskmaster, and when he gets that extra effort or sees a positive response, he acknowledges and praises the students. This 'hands-on' style shows the value of knowing what is going on as the result of personal observation and attention to detail. In Episode 6, he debriefs the students after they have delivered a successful charity dinner, a challenge which involved them having to cook in a tent in a field outside a stately

home, in the rain. He thanks them for their effort, encouraging them to feel proud of what they have achieved as a group. He also evaluates each of them individually, singling out both strengths and weaknesses in their technique and attitude.

Trust, respect and discipline

His technical knowledge aside, another important aspect of Oliver's credibility with this difficult group derives from his own experience as a young unqualified person and his natural empathy with some of the trainees' problems and circumstances. However, he does not let this empathy blind him to their faults and failings, or prevent him from dealing quickly and firmly with poor standards or breaches of discipline. He makes it clear that trust and respect have to run both ways: he bestows considerable trust upon the employees; in return he asks that they trust his judgement and do what he wants. Similarly he respects them as individuals and encourages them to respect each other – for instance by making sure that they all greet each other at the start of service and say goodbye at the end of the day.

If their behaviour is unacceptable then he does not hesitate to tell them so; nevertheless his emphasis is always on their behaviour, and what they need to do differently in the future in order to meet the required standards. One of the technically better students is eventually suspended from the course after aggressive and violent behaviour at college; this cannot be accepted in an already potentially dangerous working environment. In Episode 6 Oliver carries out a disciplinary interview which is in effect a final warning for another two of the trainees who have been absenting themselves without reason from both college and the kitchens where they have been doing their practical experience placement. His language is colourful but in essence he spells out the problem, explains how it affects all concerned and makes very clear what they need to do next. He explains that their absence not only causes him to waste time on unnecessary phone calls, but, and using the sort of language they will understand, that:

If you treat them (the chefs hosting the trainees in their kitchens) like shit and you're unprofessional, one, they think I'm a wanker, two, they think the charity is a load of bollocks and three, they ain't going to take on another student. So you're not only disrespecting yourselves, you're disrespecting me and you're disrespecting the students who are going to come on this course for evermore. So this is what is going to happen; three strikes and you're out . . . You've got to behave like an adult, and in return I'll give you my time and I'll give you the connections . . . If you're not going to do that, then go away.

His approach to discipline is quick and consistent; when someone makes a mistake he points out what

they have done, explains why it caused a problem, and tells them what to do to remedy the situation; after that it is over and forgotten – at least as far as he is concerned.

Success or failure?

Not all of the original 15 students completed the course successfully; however, some were able to retake exams and continue in the profession, and the scheme resulted in some real success stories for those who did achieve qualifications and subsequently pursued new careers as chefs. One of the successful students, Elisa Roche, has written about kitchen culture and the difficulty, particularly for women, of adapting to an aggressive, macho world.⁵ On the other hand, the restaurant itself was a success, and established itself on the London food scene very quickly. The whole idea behind the restaurant and the training project attracted a certain amount of criticism in the press; it was accused of being a publicity stunt and essentially self-promotion by Oliver. The creation of a permanent foundation (originally called Cheeky Chops) to recruit

disadvantaged young people into the industry clearly shows this was more than a one-off stunt for the cameras. In 2004 Cheeky Chops was relaunched as The Fifteen Foundation⁶ when Oliver and Liam Black, an experienced social entrepreneur, went into partnership to extend the programme. The majority of the money to run the Foundation came initially from fundraising events featuring Oliver, but by 2005 the profits from the original restaurant in London made a significant contribution to the Foundation.⁷ Franchised versions of the restaurant, together with the associated training programme, form the nodes of the Foundation's activity, and the franchises are expected to make increasing contributions to its revenues in the future. The first franchise opened in Amsterdam in December 2004, the second in Cornwall in May 2006, and an Australian branch in Melbourne was recruiting in September of that year.⁸ A further venture in the UK is an on-line shop (Fifteenshop.net), the profits from sales going to the Foundation. Far from being a one-off, Fifteen is becoming a serious global brand of social entrepreneurship.

Your tasks

- Using Mintzberg's classification, analyse the roles played by Jamie Oliver as a manager in the 'Fifteen' enterprise.
- Critically evaluate the idea that managers can be regarded as Theory X, Theory Y or Theory Z. Which is Jamie? Find evidence from the case to support your view.
- Carry out an analysis of the manager in this case using the framework provided in Figure 12.4.
- Assess Jamie Oliver's approach to human resource management activities such as recruitment and selection, training and appraisal, and disciplinary measures.
- Using evidence from the case, explain whether you consider his approach to the management of human resources as 'unitary' or 'pluralistic'?

Notes and references

- 1 Blythman, J. *Bad Food Britain*, Fourth Estate (2006).
- 2 See www.feedmebetter.com.
- 3 *Jamie's Kitchen*, Channel 4. Available on DVD.
- 4 *Jamie's Kitchen*, Episode 3.
- 5 Roche, E. 'If You Can't Stand the Heat ... Get Some Balls', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2004.
- 6 The Fifteen Foundation website is at www.fifteen.net (accessed 5 August 2009).
- 7 Benjamin, A. 'Recipe for Success', *The Guardian*, 10 May 2006.
- 8 See www.fifteen.net (accessed 5 August 2009).