

# The 14-Day Chef Onboarding Plan

A day-by-day schedule for getting a new chef from first shift to running a section solo. Print one per hire. Tick boxes as you go.

## Days 1–3 · Kitchen, safety, and the hits

ABSORPTION

- Walk every station**, every fridge, every shelf in the cold room. Where things live and where they go back to. Labelling and rotation system.
- Hand over the recipe book**. Written, with weights, photos, allergen tags. Not verbal. Chef reads it on day one alone; discussion day two.
- Allergen + food-safety walkthrough**. Cleaning schedule, fridge-temp log, allergen matrix, chemical storage, nut-allergy protocol.
- Cook top 3 hit dishes together** — them cooking, you correcting. If they can't replicate by end of day three, you've found the gap.
- Introduce the team** — names, sections, KP, pastry, suppliers.

## Days 4–7 · Shadow service, then run prep

WATCH & DO

- Day 4–5**: shadow 2 full services at the pass. No cooking. Watch ticket flow + pickup pacing. Notes in the evening.
- Day 6**: run prep alone. Senior chef does 9am, 11am, and pre-service review. Anything missed: covered, then explained — never silently fixed.
- Day 7**: cover one section in service with senior on pass. First cooked tickets. Senior calls anything off-spec; new chef redoes the plate.

⚠ **The "silent rescue" trap**: the fastest way to ruin a chef onboarding is to fix their mistakes without telling them. The senior re-does the plate, dish goes out, new chef never knows. By week three they've made the same mistake forty times. **Always show the mistake. Always explain the fix. Always let them redo it.**

## Days 8–10 · Solo on a section

PRODUCTION

- Run a full section solo**. Senior chef stays on pass, calls tickets, doesn't cook the section.
- End-of-shift review (10 min, every night)**: Ticket times — any >25 min mains? Pickup errors — anything sent back? Confidence drift — any dish hesitated on?
- Document patterns**. Patterns appear fast. Three nights tells you most of what you need to know.

## Days 11–14 · Own the rotating 20% (specials)

OWNERSHIP

- Design the next 2-week specials slot** — within your usual constraints (food cost, allergens, supplier availability, your style).
- Cost, brief, run**. Recipes written; team briefed; dishes run in service.
- Track every special**: sold X of Y target, kept or killed at end of cycle.
- Day 14 sign-off conversation** (see overleaf).

## Day 14 sign-off + recipe handover

The conversation most owners skip, and the system check that determines whether onboarding actually worked.

### The day 14 conversation (15 minutes, both ways)

#### YOU ASK THEM

1. What's the hardest thing you've learned so far?
2. What's still confusing or where do you feel slow?
3. What do you want to own in the next 30 days that you don't yet?

#### YOU TELL THEM (OR THEY ASK)

1. Where I want you 30 days from now — what gets handed off next.
2. The one habit I've noticed that's a strength + the one that's a risk.
3. Is the fit honest on both sides — if not, when do we talk again?

*Not a performance review. Three honest sentences each way. Force the conversation even if it's awkward — especially if it's awkward.*

### What "onboarded" actually means by day 14

By day 14 a chef who's been onboarded properly should be able to do **all four** of these without supervision:

- Cook every dish on the main menu to your standard, from a written recipe, without asking.
- Run prep for a full service day — what to make, how much, in what order.
- Work the pass during a busy service alongside the senior team without slowing tickets.
- Identify allergens on every dish, follow your cross-contamination rules, complete daily safety logs without prompting.

**If by day 14 they can't do any one of those four** — the plan didn't work. The answer is almost never "give them more time." It's "the handover system was incomplete." Which is the part you control.

### Recipe handover checklist — pick one format, commit

- Paper recipe book.** Ring binder, one recipe per page: photo, weights, prep notes, allergens. Cheap, works, food-stains.
- Purpose-built tool.** A restaurant ops app — recipe + allergens + menu printing in one. Always current because the menu generates from it.
- Shared digital folder.** Drive / Notion / Dropbox. Survives staff turnover. Needs discipline.
- The test:** new chef arrives Monday, opens it on day one, cooks your top 3 dishes by Wednesday. If they can't, the handover system is broken — not the chef.

### First-week red flags (don't wait for month three)

- Doesn't ask questions on day 2** — ego or disengagement. Address by day 5.
- Insists their recipe is better than yours on day 3** — won't follow your standard under pressure.
- Allergen sloppiness** — non-negotiable. One warning + retraining. Recurrence = part ways.
- Doesn't engage with the team** — won't be in the culture in 6 months. Rarely improves on its own.

*One signal alone isn't a verdict. Two together is a serious conversation. Three: the hire was wrong — kindest thing for both sides is to admit it before more is invested.*