

## Think smarter to improve skills

Don't let busy schedules stop you from continual learning. Ken Burgin offers tips for improving your and your staff's skills with minimal pain.



BUSY, BUSY, busy, busy. It's easy for another six months to pass by and you've done nothing to 'sharpen the saw' or improve your skills. The industry is changing at rocket speed, and we already have too many unhappy dinosaurs, without you joining them in the swamp.

The options have exploded. These days you can browse *Hospitality* magazine (in hard copy and online), search Google for new products, read experts' updates in a blog, watch a web seminar on your PC or listen to a podcast while driving. How you want it and when you want it?

**Start with your iPod.** Most people use it for music, but open up iTunes on your computer and find the iTunes Store. Search for a topic of interest like 'food safety', 'food trends' or 'wine'. You'll find hundreds of free podcasts ready to download — they're like radio programs but you listen when it suits you, when you're driving, at the gym or maybe plugged into speakers in the kitchen. When you find an interesting podcast, subscribe and download. In this business, we're all good at multi-tasking, so listen while you chop or set up the bar.

Feeling low-tech? Head to the Apple website and look for the "support centre". It's packed with short videos explaining everything you need to know.

**Invest in an iPad.** I'm not a Steve Jobs fanatic, but the ease

and flexibility of iPads makes them endlessly useful around your venue. By eliminating wires and short battery life, they can be used anywhere — for showing function customers the menus and room options, sharing training videos with new staff, placing online orders and check in emails wherever you are. They're easy to use — if you can use a touch-screen POS, you're there.

**Tune in to web seminars.** Our Profitable Hospitality web seminars — or webinars — start this month. They're one-hour online sessions where you sit at your PC and watch a presentation on the latest promotional ideas, social media marketing, menu development, industry trends and staff management. In the old days, information like this needed personal attendance at a seminar, if you were lucky to be in the right city. Now you just click on an email link to watch, listen and ask questions. You'll even have the option to watch the session later at a more convenient time.

And if you do want to get away for a few days of concentrated training, consider the Clubs + Wedding & Events Summit next month in Sydney, or one of the regular trade fairs held in every large city. Maybe you're a little jaded by these events, but most of your staff have never had the opportunity. There's always a boost of energy and enthusiasm if you take them along.

What else is on your personal development list? Typing skills usually need a boost — use one of the game-based systems on your new iPad. Follow the easy online videos at Lynda.com to learn how spreadsheets can analyse costs and sales — juggling figures with confidence has never been more important. Acquire a deeper understanding of menu engineering and recipe costing with online courses and recipe software like Profitable Recipe Manager.

Chefs, why not improve your food photography skills? It's

much more than point and flash, but doesn't need an expensive camera. Photography is ever more useful for online promotions — you can be the expert. Experienced chefs are also adding qualifications in food safety management and auditing — making hygiene part of your expertise and a way to move out of production if you've been over a stove for too long. Much of this training can be done online, and paced to the time available.

Keen to improve staff management skills? It's a strength that will always be in demand. It may be the fine points of how to discipline or dismiss a staff member. Or how to design and run performance reviews, train small groups and offer career planning. Managing drug and alcohol issues is a constant issue in this industry, and your specialised skills will be much appreciated. In fact people management in every area will be appreciated: from better understanding young staff to conflict management, team building and the wide range of mental health issues.

Wine and beverage knowledge is a passion for many front-of-house staff, and as they learn they can also teach. Sommelier training and advanced wine appreciation is widely available, but make sure this is also shared with the floor staff. It's wonderful to see young staff develop a passion for wine, and their rising confidence is always reflected in better sales.

So much to do — how will you make the time? When learning is hard, serious and boring, there's always something else that needs doing first. But when it's fun and feels like there's a reward attached, it's surprising how we fit it all in.

*Ken Burgin is a leading hospitality industry consultant. For more information visit [profitablehospitality.com](http://profitablehospitality.com) or call 1800 001 353.*



## Eight Steps to Happiness

To the enlightened, Eight Steps To Happiness may sound like the Buddhist way of loving kindness and the source of true happiness — but we know better. It is the impressive collection of eight perfumed *PorkStars* who feature in our latest *Porkstar* campaign. These eight are at the cutting edge of bringing true happiness to customers through their enlightened work with pork. Chui Lee Luk, *Claude's*, Sydney • Bethany Finn, *Urban Bistro*, Adelaide • Alex Herbert, *Bird Cow Fish*, Sydney • Belinda Franks, *Belinda Franks Catering*, Sydney • Saskia Beer, *Black Pig*, Barossa • Dominique Rizzo, *Pure Food Cooking*, Brisbane • Lauren Murdoch, *Felix*, Sydney • Christine Manfield, *Universal*, Sydney — each of the eight is a hero, role model or mentor and is highly successful and influential in the culinary world. There is one overwhelming common link between these celebrated chefs whose culinary diversity is limitless. They are all *PorkStars*. With gastronomic offerings ranging from intimate fine dining to enormous elaborate events, these *PorkStars* utilise the noble pig from nose to tail — and everything in between.

And throughout April they will join other savvy chefs in tempting their customers with special pork dishes in celebration of the month-long International Festival of Pork. This inaugural pork fest will be a veritable 'world tour' in praise of pork. It will showcase the versatility, cultural diversity and enduring popularity of the most widely consumed and celebrated meat across the planet. Join the porcine festivities by putting some pork on your menu and be in with a chance to fly to London, dine at St John and meet Fergus Henderson.

Register your International Festival of Pork dish and go in the running for the major prize at:

[porkfest@australianpork.com.au](http://porkfest@australianpork.com.au)



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