

A Passion for Food Helps Her Serve the Customers: A Conversation with Crystal Drohen

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By: Erin Flaherty



Formal culinary training and an obvious passion for food give Inside Sales representative Crystal Drohen a unique insight on what her customers may be looking for.

“Sometimes [chefs] get stuck for ideas. It’s nice to be able to make suggestions for people and give them new ideas,” she said. “Having an outside person give you suggestions gives you a different way to look at [the problem].”

For the past year and a half, Drohen has been helping her customers with suggestions pulled from her culinary training in high school and the Culinary Institute of Vermont, and her time at DPI Specialty Foods in Oregon.

“I felt like DPI turned me into a food encyclopedia,” she said. “I learned about cheeses, oils and all different kinds of food.”

But, her culinary career started long before working at DPI. From the time she was in middle school, Drohen knew that she wanted to be in the culinary world and even took part in a two year culinary program in high school, before going onto the Culinary Institute where she decided that she wanted to become a chef.

“I realized that being a chef, you could get a job anywhere,” she said.

As an intern, she worked in Idaho and Florida, before taking permanent jobs in Arizona and Oregon working her way up through the kitchens, making it all the way to sous chef at the Dundee Bistro in Oregon’s wine country before she had to get out of the kitchen due to health concerns.

“I loved being able to pair food with wines,” she said. “But, I started having leg problems from being on my feet all day. It took me a long time to figure out what I wanted to do. I knew I loved food and wanted to stay with it.”

Working at DPI allowed her to stay in the food industry in a less physically demanding role, but eventually the New Hampshire native began to miss her family and moved back to the East Coast and found that Progressive Gourmet shared her passion for food.

During her time in the industry, Drohen has definitely seen some changes in the way chefs think about food and prepare it for their customers.

“I think that people are going back to simple preparations,” she said. “When I first started out, chefs were adding all different garnishes and having multiple components and now it’s just going back to the basics.”

When Drohen isn’t helping Progressive Gourmet’s customers come up with the best menu solutions, you’ll often find her in the kitchen where she enjoys trying out new recipes and flavor combinations. One of her biggest accomplishments was helping a friend from the American Cheese Society create recipes for a German cheese company’s packaging.

As she looks the future, Drohen knows not to plan her life out too much.

“At 14 I knew I wanted to go to culinary school and I’ve ended up in sales,” she said. “Life has a funny way of changing things. Eventually I want to have a family, but I’m very confident that I will always be in the food industry.”

