

## Vlad The Chef - Do you really sense what is going on?

Last month I had the pleasure of spending a day at The Raymond Blanc Cookery School at the famous Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons Restaurant. I'd been really looking forward to the day and expected it to be a very different experience. However, I wasn't prepared for my senses being simultaneously bombarded with so much information!



Our instructor, pictured left, was Vlad a charismatic and fun ball of energy. He was obviously totally passionate about food and his passion was contagious. At the outset Vlad described cooking as something that you do with all your senses and this set the tone for the day.

We observed the difference between melted butter and nutty butter, ie butter which had been melted until it became a rich brown. Our pallets were challenged to taste the difference between a 'good' red wine vinegar and a 'superb' red wine vinegar; a £13 bottle of balsamic

vinegar and a £80 bottle of balsamic vinegar and we were constantly invited to sample ingredients and describe the subtleties of tastes we encountered.

I'd never appreciated that a tray of cloves, bay leaves and cinnamon would smell so much richer when they'd been heated in the oven for a minute to excite the oils. A rich smell suddenly became so much richer and evocative. And our ears? Well, even they were put to good use. We were taught to listen out for the 'shhh, shhh, shh' of a 'happy pan' as well as the best music to cook to! Indeed watching Vlad he truly cooked using all his senses with his eyes, ears, nose, mouth and touch constantly taking in and processing information. At every stage during the day Vlad knew exactly what was going on, he was able to perfectly read the mood of his kitchen.

'Very interesting but so what?' you may be saying, 'How does this relate to me?' Well, I believe there is a link. In their book, [Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?](#) Goffee and Jones describe four 'unexpected qualities' which they believe inspirational leaders share, one of which is their ability to collect and interpret soft data, helping them know just when and how to act. Goffee and Jones argue that, 'Being sensitive to context, being able to detect the way the wind is blowing is essential for any leader'. They go on to speak of the importance of having keen observational skills, the ability to pick up soft data, collect information seemingly through osmosis, being able to read the atmosphere and ambience including all the hidden feelings and undertones. Such situation sensing requires first hand observation rather than, as so often happens, relying on the senses of others. In short it is about using all of our senses to pick up information and then adjusting our behaviour to suit the situation.

So, how do we fine tune our situation sensing skills? Well, you could enrol on a cookery course at Le Manoir .... Or you could try some of the following exercises.

1. Take a moment and notice for yourself your five senses. Do you really sense what is going on? What can you see as you sit here now? Notice the sights around you. What do you notice that you didn't notice before I asked you to focus your attention on what you can see? What can you hear around you? Are there any sounds that you can hear now I've told you to notice what you can hear that you weren't aware of before? Now be aware of what you can feel. What feelings are you suddenly conscious of now that I've told you to be aware of your feelings. These may be emotional feelings or physical. What tastes or smells do you notice? How would you describe these tastes or smells?

2. Choose one of your senses and decide to pay real attention to this sense during the day. Notice some of the finer nuances of this sense. For example, if you are focussing on hearing, notice the volume, pitch, tone, frequency, speed, location and clarity of these sounds. Compare what you are noticing at the end of the day with your observation skills at the start of the day. What has changed? Do you really sense what is going on?



Gill Graves

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