



# Why we need to be strict: The push for culinary success



She has been portrayed as cold by contestants in the past and many times the longest running judge of Rock Chef looks like it on screen. But how is she in real life? For the first time Intouch can reveal the things that make Victoria Garcia Bishop tick, what she thinks about the show.

"You never know what you're capable of until you're pushed up against the wall," said Vicky of the pressure applied to contestants. "If it comes across that we're being tough on them, that's because it's how we get the best out of everybody. The same is true of anybody in any environment except in this case we have the added urgency on the job which is a factor that brings with it a lot of pressure in our profession.

"In the latter stages of the competition, as we are expecting a lot of them, some contestants can get very nervous and my job there is to keep them calm and focused and encouraging the best out of them. I feel I'm

always professional and sometimes more helpful when I need to be, which is more in-keeping with my character. There are times when I have to be strict, get my head down and get the job done... at the end of the day the contestants are here to be judged and I am one of the judges."

## Stimulating professionalism

As a person who has a keen interest in food she has been in the catering business for 26 years, the last 19 with her own company. Having studied Hotel Catering and Institutional Management at Westminster College, at the same time as Jamie Oliver was studying there, her passion for food led her into the kitchen and she became a self-taught chef, working in various catering establishments including the Elliot's Hotel as Sous Chef, before starting off her own project. She was asked to participate in Rock Chef by Gemma and Jordan in the first edition three years ago, and since then hasn't looked back. "I just keep my professional head on me as I'm just there to do my job," she said of judging fellow Gibraltarians, always a tricky task with the public backlash that can have. "I try to be diplomatic so as not to offend but

I am opinionated by character. I don't even think of the fact that I might know someone or they might be my neighbour's son-in-law. I'm simply doing my job. Our trade is like that, you just say what you have to say and call command to get what's required form each other to get the food out and keep the punters happy. It's a tough trade in many ways with unsociable long hours but I wouldn't do anything else, it's my life. The beauty of the job is its all about team work so the bond you form with your co-workers is very rewarding.

The fact that Vicky does not get paid for her role is ever more evidence of how professionalism goes beyond a wage. "I get great pleasure and enjoyment out of seeing peoples willingness to learn and motivation. I enjoy participating in this process because it's fantastic for the catering trade in Gibraltar."

Her commitment to the show is just the tip of an iceberg that symbolizes her desire to promote catering on the Rock because she has never felt it has been taken seriously enough. "It's very much what people do

when they feel they can't do much else, and I'd like to change that mentality," said the career chef. "I'd like to teach people that it's a vocational job, very hard labour but extremely gratifying. It's teamwork for the betterment of the client; it's a service-orientated business which unfortunately can be quite under-paid in Gib.

"RockChef gives people a very valuable insight into our industry which no other programme does. When would you get the opportunity as a lay person to come in off the street and work in a busy restaurant?"

This insight is one shared by the TV audience giving restaurant-goers a chance to observe how much work goes into particular dishes, especially as Rock Chef shows a snapshot of this process which in everyday life has to be maintained or even increased in order to keep a good reputation.

## A world apart

There are different skills involved in being a good chef compared to being a good cook. While the latter means contestants have to be intuitive about what they are creating, the former is all about keeping their wits about them and delivering under pressure. Judges are so honed to these finer details they can observe the level of skill and capability the first time contestants enter the kitchen and take on a particular task. But it is their natural development during the season that demonstrates to them who handle it best and use it to their own advantage or who will be overwhelmed by the pressure.

The urgency is most evident when the contestants are forced to face a paying public with their dishes as satisfying the primal urge to eat is always tricky because of the difference of palates within the community. Under this pressure, introducing anonymous people to a dynamic of communication that is almost sacred to the culinary profession is what defines the winners from the losers and this is something which we saw as we got closer to the final.

"The kitchen creates a very tight bond with the people that you work with," said Vicky. "You need to rely on each other and a lot of us are not used to working in a team like that. Communication is paramount in the kitchen. You communicate so you don't injure one another, so you can navigate swiftly around the kitchen, to tell someone that you have something hot in your hand. And

to synchronise service and get those plates out the pass on time to keep your dinners coming back. That communication creates a bond and we get that with the contestants so that every year we have new buddies with a genuine interest in food and passing on their knowledge to each other."

This creates a hunger for understanding and knowledge which the judges and other chefs are willing to pass on so even though the process is hard work and they have to put on a very professional front, they are enjoying the whole process. This is a fact not only unique to Vicky, but also put across by the wide spectrum of professionals that participated in Rock Chef.

Vicky speaks for the rest of them when she said she is as hard on herself as she is on her team because she is a perfectionist and wants to preserve that same high standard she keeps in her own everyday working life. "If I felt somebody wasn't capable of something I wouldn't bother pushing them for it and would just do it myself," she stated. "I don't think I'm being insensitive. I just don't beat around the bush because I'm too busy. We're all too busy."

## Unique style

The TV audience will have noted that as the programme progressed Vicky started to get softer and more encouraging on the contestants as they started to understand each other better and they respond to her advice without her needing to be so strict. As the challenges get more acute, off camera she is abundant in her praise, advice and support for their efforts.

This is especially the case when the amateur chefs overshoot the mark in what they can realistically achieve on camera with the dishes they are used to serving at home to their family and friends. "They have to find the balance between showing the right amount of skill and pushing themselves too far," she told us. "Where people trip up is that it is one thing to make a recipe for ten people and something totally different to do it on demand in a restaurant environment full of dinners. All the preparation has to be done beforehand so that they can deliver as and when the customer demands of them. Along with the volume this is the difference to home cooking."

The development of a particular dish is dependent on the style of each chef, and



that puts across the way they like to cook and some element of their personality. The application of that style (most apparent in their signature dish) to the different challenges that are presented to the contestants is what defines their performance and whether when tweaked a little, it works or not. That style is inherently influenced by our Gibraltarian culture and identity which in itself is very diverse with the mix giving any critic a hard time defining.

"We're very big on flavour in that we like our garlic and our seasoning," said Vicky who in her own time loves cooking fish and vegetables especially. "I like bold flavours but at the same time I honour the ingredients as well, so if I have a delicately flavoured fish I wouldn't necessarily infuse it with a lot of other flavours. I would maybe use some herbs and lemon on it but not complicate it too much."

She is inspired by worldwide chefs like Israeli Yotam Ottolenghi and Claudia Roden, whose Middle Eastern palates with a Western twist have heavily influenced British cooking.

In the same way as she gets inspired to cook by these culinary experts, she hopes she can inspire others to cook as well. "We express ourselves very well with food on the Rock and if my work can help create a better awareness of the kitchen inside and outside the workplace and inspire people to cook more often and healthy dishes too, I will feel I have succeeded in my mission."