

MZ-5.1 · V2.7 (DRAFT)

# MEZZÉ#1

MEDITERRANEAN EATERY & BAR



# FOH FIRST INTERVIEW MANAGER TRAINING

*Owned by Riad El Khaliabi & Irina Shlyakhova*

FIRST EDITION · 2026 · CONROE · FULSHEAR

## HOW THIS WORKS

# THREE STAGES, END TO END

First interview screens. Second interview + onboarding decides. Training begins on Day 1.

## THE THREE STAGES

STAGE	WHO RUNS IT	WHAT IT DECIDES
1. First interview (this doc)	FOH manager	Good enough fit to send to the owner?
2. Second interview + onboarding (MZ-5.2)	Riad or Irina	Hired or not. If yes, paperwork done same day.
3. Training begins (Training-002 + 003)	Manager / assistant / senior	Day 1 onward. <b>Day 1 is the orientation</b> — brand, menu walkthrough, POS, 9 Steps overview. Then 8 more days of training to sign-off.

**BRAND NOTE**

There is **no separate orientation step** between onboarding and training. The orientation IS Day 1 of training — paid, on the schedule, in uniform. Onboarding (the paperwork visit with the owner) is the last unpaid step before the new hire becomes a paid trainee.

## WHAT THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Riad and Irina have said clearly: *we have difficulty deciding from the first interview whether someone is a good fit*. This guide fixes that. It defines what a good MEZZÉ#1 server looks like, lists the signals to watch for, and gives a three-bucket decision framework. The manager runs the interview, sends clear fits to the owner, declines clear misses, and uses the framework on page 8 when unsure.

**BRAND NOTE**

The first interview is a filter, not the hire. The manager does not extend offers, does not discuss pay specifics beyond the basics, and does not promise anything. The manager's job is to send the right people to Riad and Irina — and protect the team from the wrong ones.



## WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

# DEFINE THE TARGET

*We hire servers who treat a guest the way they would treat someone in their own home.*

## THE SEVEN QUALITIES OF A MEZZÉ#1 SERVER

These are the qualities the brand is built on. Not all seven will be obvious in one interview. **Look for at least four.**

#	QUALITY	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE IN THE INTERVIEW
1	<b>They notice people.</b>	They mention the host who greeted them, a server they passed on the way in, a detail from a previous job that involved reading a guest's mood.
2	<b>They like serving.</b>	Their stories about past service jobs come with energy. They are not serving as a stopgap until they find their 'real' job.
3	<b>Warmth comes through their voice.</b>	A stranger can hear it. If the manager feels colder talking to them, a guest will feel colder too.
4	<b>They hold composure under pressure.</b>	Their stories include moments that went wrong — and what they did about it. Calm under fire is a teachable signal.
5	<b>They show up.</b>	On time, in clean clothes, presented well. Reliability shows in how the candidate arrives at the interview itself.
6	<b>They are curious.</b>	They looked us up before today. They ask questions about the menu, the team, the room. Curiosity is the foundation of mastery.
7	<b>They communicate clearly in English.</b>	Clearly enough to handle a floor with English-speaking guests. Accent is fine. Confusion is not.

### BRAND NOTE

The brand can be taught. The seven qualities cannot be. You can train someone on the menu and the 9 Steps. You cannot train them to like serving people. Hire the temperament; train the standard.



WHO WE CAN CONSIDER

# FILTERS, PREFERENCES, SCHEDULING

*Some are non-negotiable. Some are operational preferences. All matter.*

## LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (NON-NEGOTIABLE)

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- **Must be legally allowed to work in the United States.** Confirmed by I-9 at the second interview. If unclear from the application, ask in the first interview: 'Are you legally able to work in the United States?'
- **Must be 18 or older to serve alcohol with supervision.** Confirmed by ID at the second interview.
- **Must obtain TABC + Texas Food Handler certifications within 14 days of hire.** Candidate pays. Tell them clearly in the first interview — not a surprise at the second.

## AGE PREFERENCE: 21+ FOR ALL FOH ROLES

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Texas allows alcohol service at 18+ with supervision from a 21+ staff member. Legally we can hire 18-20-year-olds. **Operationally we prefer 21+ for every FOH role — host, server, bartender.** Two reasons:

- We cannot always guarantee a 21+ supervisor is on every shift. A trainee or junior server is not a supervisor.
- If we hire more than two underage staff, the schedule becomes very difficult — we have to pair them with 21+ supervisors on every shift, every time. Even hosts count toward this cap because the schedule has to keep enough 21+ staff across all roles on every shift.

### The rule:

- **21+ — preferred.** Hire freely if they meet the other criteria. All roles.
- **18-20 — conditional.** Acceptable only if we currently have fewer than 2 other underage staff **and** we can guarantee 21+ supervision on every shift they work.
- **Under 18 — no.** Cannot serve alcohol at all under Texas law.

## OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

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- **Schedule fit.** We are open 11 AM to 10 PM Sun-Thu, 11 PM Fri-Sat. Continuous service. If the candidate cannot work nights or weekends at all, they are not a fit for the floor.
- **Reliable transportation.** Conroe and Fulshear are not on transit lines. The candidate needs a way to get to work every shift.
- **Communication in English.** They must be able to take an order, describe a dish, and handle a complaint in English. Accent is fine; confusion is not.

## THE 80% SCHEDULING RULE — FOR ALL FOH STAFF

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Write down every team member's stated availability — new hires in Step 6 of the interview, existing staff via their availability in 7shifts. **When scheduling, schedule them at about 80% of that availability — not 100%.** Everyone — new hires, seasoned servers, hosts, bartenders.

**Why:** the 20% they are not scheduled becomes our backup capacity. When someone calls out, we have a person with open availability who can pick up the shift — without violating their stated limits.

**Example:** a server says they can work Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat dinner. That is 5 dinners available. Schedule them for 4 of the 5 in a typical week. Keep one open as backup capacity. When you call them for a Wednesday call-out, it's a shift they already said they could work — not extra pressure.

### BRAND NOTE

The 80% rule is how we run the schedule, not just how we onboard. Apply it to every active staff member every week. When MZ-2.1 FOH Operations Manual is rebuilt, this rule moves there as the canonical source.

## TENURE PREFERENCE: LONG-TERM OVER SHORT-TERM

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We invest nine paid days of training, plus owner time and management attention, in every new hire. **We prefer hires who are looking to stay.** 'Built to Be Loved for Decades' is a brand pillar — it applies to the team, not just the guests.

- **Long-term intent — preferred.** Candidate sees this as a real job they want to keep. Hire freely if they meet other criteria.
- **Short-term intent — generally decline.** Candidate says they are moving, leaving for school, in transition. Even if otherwise strong.
- **Exception:** we are very short-staffed **and** the candidate is strong. Hire anyway. Tell Riad or Irina the tenure situation when passing forward.

## THINGS WE DO NOT SCREEN ON

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- Knowledge of Middle Eastern cuisine. Preferred but not required. We teach this in Training-004.
- Restaurant experience as a hard requirement. Strong will to learn beats five years of weak experience.
- Bilingual ability. Bonus but not required.

### BRAND NOTE

Legal requirements are non-negotiable. Age preference and the 80% scheduling rule are operational policies — they are how we run the floor, not legal limits. Manager judgment applies, but the defaults stand unless the owner approves an exception.

## IV

## WHAT TO WATCH FOR

## SIGNALS AND RED FLAGS

Concrete observations during the interview. Not vague feelings.

## GREEN LIGHTS — SIGNALS OF FIT

SIGNAL	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
They were warm with the host on arrival.	They are warm with strangers by default.
They are present — not on their phone in the lobby.	They respect the moment they are in.
Their stories are specific. Names, places, details.	They actually did the work. They were not coasting.
They talk about past employers with grace, even the hard ones.	They will talk about us the same way.
They look at the room as well as at you.	Curiosity. They are taking in where they might work.
They ask substantive questions — about the menu, the team, the standard.	They are choosing us, not just any job.
They acknowledge what they don't know.	Honesty. Coachability.
They smiled at least once during the interview, naturally.	Warmth is real, not performed.

## RED FLAGS — SIGNALS OF MISFIT

RED FLAG	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Negative about a previous employer or colleague.	They will be negative about us. Hard pass.
Cannot give a specific example when asked. Everything is general.	They did not pay attention at past jobs. Won't pay attention here.
No questions at the end.	No curiosity. No engagement with the role.
Did not look us up before today. Cannot describe what MEZZÉ#1 serves.	Lazy preparation. Will be lazy on the floor.
Late without acknowledgment or apology.	How they show up here is how they will show up to a shift.
On their phone in the lobby before the interview.	Lack of focus. They are already somewhere else.
Difficulty with the situational questions — cannot picture themselves on a floor.	No hospitality instinct. Cannot be taught quickly.
English communication is unclear enough that a guest would struggle.	Honest constraint. The role requires it. Not a fit for FOH.

## BRAND NOTE

**One red flag is not automatic disqualification.** But two red flags from different categories — for example, 'negative about previous employer' plus 'no questions at the end' — is. Three of anything is always a no.

# V

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

## MANAGER PREP

*Ten minutes of prep makes the difference.*

### THE DAY BEFORE

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- Read the candidate's resume or application. Note any gaps in employment, any prior restaurants you recognize, any red flags.
- Write down two or three specific questions for this candidate — based on their history.
- Block 45 minutes on your calendar. Not 30, not 60. Forty-five.
- Pick a table or quiet corner. Not the office (we don't have one). Not the bar during service. Not the host stand. Somewhere the candidate can think.

### JUST BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

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- Be on the floor when they walk in. Watch how they greet the host. That is your first data point.
- Walk them to the interview spot. Offer them water. Hospitality starts at the door, even with candidates we may not hire.
- Have this guide open at the page with the six steps.

### WHAT YOU DO NOT DO IN THE FIRST INTERVIEW

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- **You do not extend an offer.** The owner does that in the second interview.
- **You do not discuss pay specifics** beyond the basics (\$2.13/hr base + tips, tip-out structure mentioned generally). Detailed pay comes in the second interview with the owner.
- **You do not promise schedule flexibility, growth opportunities, or anything else.** If they ask, say: 'That is something Riad or Irina will go through with you if we move forward.'
- **You do not request sensitive documents.** No ID, no SSN, no W-9. Those come at the second interview.

#### BRAND NOTE

The first interview is a screening. The manager is the gatekeeper. The owner is the decider. Stay in your lane.

# VI

## THE INTERVIEW

# SIX STEPS · PART 1

30 to 45 minutes. The flow is steady. The manager listens more than they talk.

## STEP 1 — WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION (5 MIN)

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Greet the candidate warmly. Introduce yourself. Brief introduction to MEZZÉ#1 — short, plain.

*"Thanks for coming in. I'm [name], the FOH manager. MEZZÉ#1 is a Mediterranean Eatery & Bar. We have two locations — this one and one other. We serve Lebanese mezzé and grilled plates. We are owned by Riad and Irina. We take service seriously."*

Do not list the four pillars or quote internal brand language. The candidate cannot meaningfully react to information they have not been trained on. Keep the intro short. Listen more than you talk.

## STEP 2 — SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE (10 MIN)

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Ask role-specific questions to evaluate their abilities. Listen for **specific stories**, not vague claims.

- 'Tell me about your most recent server job. What did the menu look like? How busy was it?'
- 'Tell me about a guest you served well. What did you do?'
- 'Tell me about a guest who was hard to please. How did it end?'
- 'How do you handle a guest who is unsure of what to order?'

Listen for the words. A candidate who says 'I just gave them the menu and let them pick' is not the same as one who says 'I asked what they were in the mood for and recommended two things.' The first sees serving as a task. The second sees it as a craft.

## STEP 3 — WHY MEZZÉ#1 (5 MIN)

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The single most important question:

*"Why do you want to work here, specifically? Not just any restaurant — here."*

It separates someone shopping for a job from someone choosing MEZZÉ#1. 'I heard you were hiring' is not the same as 'I drove by and the dining room looked beautiful, and I've been wanting to learn about Lebanese food.'

Then ask about **tenure intent**: *"Where do you see yourself in a year? Is this a long-term role for you?"* Honest answers like 'moving soon' or 'between things' mean probably not a fit, unless we are very short-staffed and they are strong. See page 11 for the rule.

# VII

## THE INTERVIEW

# SIX STEPS · PART 2

Steps 4 through 6. The situational questions are where instinct shows.

## STEP 4 — SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

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These are where instinct shows. The candidate cannot fake their way through them. Ask two or three of these:

- 'A guest is in a bad mood before they sit down. Their food arrives and they say it is not what they ordered, even though it is. What do you do?'
- 'A guest complains that their cocktail is too sweet. How do you handle it?'
- 'The kitchen is behind, the dining room is full, you have six tables. What do you do?'
- 'You notice the bar mat is dirty and the bartender is in the weeds. What do you do?'
- 'A regular comes in and asks for the server who took care of them last time. That server is off tonight. What do you say?'

Listen for: does the candidate think about the guest first? Do they own the problem, or pass it to someone else? Are they specific in their answer, or generic?

## STEP 5 — BRIEF ROLE OVERVIEW (3 MIN)

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Keep it short. The full details come at the second interview.

*"The role is server. Take orders, run food, bus tables, take care of guests end to end. Trained over nine days. Pay is \$2.13 base plus tips, tip out 10% of alcohol sales to the bartender. TABC + Food Handler certs within 14 days of hire (you pay, ~\$10 to \$15 each). Must be 18+ to serve alcohol with supervision. Open continuous service 11 AM to 10 / 11 PM."*

If they ask about pay or schedule details: 'That is something Riad or Irina will cover at a second interview.'

## STEP 6 — CLOSING (5 MIN)

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- Ask if the candidate has any questions. **If they have none, that is a red flag.**
- **Write down their availability** — what days and times they can work. (*We schedule at ~80% of stated availability across all staff; see page 11 for the rule.*)

- Tell them the next step: 'We will be in touch within 3 to 5 business days. If we move forward, the next step is a second interview with the owners.' Thank them, walk them to the door if you can. *Even candidates we are not hiring deserve a warm goodbye.*

# VIII

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

## THE DECISION

*Three buckets. Decide within 24 hours. Communicate within 48.*

### SCORE THE INTERVIEW WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF THE CANDIDATE LEAVING

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Sit down with this guide open. Go through the seven qualities. Mark each: **strong / okay / weak / not seen**. Then look at signals and red flags. Then pick a bucket.

#### BUCKET A — CLEAR YES

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**Send to Riad or Irina for the second interview.**

- At least four of the seven qualities clearly visible.
- Specific stories from real service work.
- Talks about past employers with grace.
- At least two substantive questions about the role.
- Warm voice, present body language, eye contact.
- English communication clearly sufficient for floor service.
- Showed curiosity about MEZZÉ#1 — looked us up, asked about menu or team.
- **Zero red flags.**

#### BUCKET B — MAYBE

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**Manager judgment call.** Lean one way and act on it. Do not leave a candidate in limbo for a week.

Examples:

- Less experienced but shows strong will to learn — lean yes if temperament is right.
- Strong communication but limited service experience — lean yes if they have hospitality instinct.
- Strong service experience but inflexible schedule — check that the schedule fits us before passing forward.
- **Strong candidate but short-term tenure intent** — lean yes only if we are very short-staffed; otherwise decline. Tell Riad or Irina the tenure situation when passing forward.
- One red flag, otherwise strong — second-look interview is worth it.

**If leaning yes:** pass to Riad or Irina with a note explaining the concern. The owner takes it from there.

**If leaning no:** decline. Use the rejection language on the next page.

## BUCKET C — CLEAR NO

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**Decline politely.** Use the rejection language on the next page.

- Any single hard red flag (negative about previous employer; English insufficient for floor service).
- Two or more red flags from different categories.
- Cannot give a specific example when asked — all answers are vague.
- No questions at the end. No curiosity about MEZZÉ#1.
- Fewer than three of the seven qualities visible.

### BRAND NOTE

**When in doubt, talk to the owner.** Riad or Irina would rather review a borderline candidate themselves than have a good one declined or a wrong one hired.

# IX

## COMMUNICATING OUTCOMES

# HOW TO SAY YES AND HOW TO SAY NO

*Both with care. Hospitality applies to people we are not hiring too.*

## IF YES — SCHEDULE THE SECOND INTERVIEW

Call the candidate within 3 to 5 business days. Do not ghost between the first and second interview.

*"Hi [name], it's [manager] from MEZZÉ#1. We enjoyed our conversation. Riad and Irina, the owners, would like to meet with you for a second interview. The visit will run up to two hours. The first part is a conversation; if they extend an offer at the end and you accept, you would handle the paperwork the same day. Please bring a valid government ID, your Social Security card, and bank account info for direct deposit. When works for you?"*

Schedule the visit with Riad or Irina. Confirm by text the same day.

## IF NO — DECLINE WITH GRACE

Use one of these messages. Send within 48 hours of the interview. Keep it short, keep it warm.

### EMAIL OR TEXT VERSION A

*"Hi [name], thank you for taking the time to meet with me about the server role at MEZZÉ#1. We have decided to move forward with other candidates, but I appreciated our conversation. I wish you the best in your search."*

### EMAIL OR TEXT VERSION B

*"Hi [name], thanks again for coming in. After thinking it through, we are going with someone else for this role. I really appreciate the time you spent with us, and I wish you success in your next step."*

### BRAND NOTE

Do not over-explain. Do not list reasons. Do not promise to keep their resume on file unless you mean it. A short, warm, honest decline is more respectful than a long one full of qualifications.