

Development and Effect of Relations in Gordon Ramsey's Hell's Kitchen

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Abstract

This study of the *Hell's Kitchen* show and community was conducted to determine how the relationships developed during the competition between contestants as well as judges, and how it affected the overall performance of the contestants themselves. The study was conducted in three uninterrupted sessions, for one episode at a time in which the first notes were basic observations. The second and third observations were conducted in relation to the developed research question. I was able to determine that the blue team performed better; the relationships that developed throughout the competition helped enable the team to perform much better. The observations also led to the conclusion that the red team focused more on destroying and tarnishing the relations between each other, rather than focusing on winning the competition. Throughout the study, I found that if the members of the team focused on constructive criticism, rather than insulting their teammates, they performed much better. It is important to note that the study was conducted while observing season seventeen of the show *Hell's Kitchen* because I wanted to observe an already established culture, in addition to there already being relationships that were already developed in previous seasons. Additionally, my first observation lasted thirty minutes initially, but after a short reflection, it was decided that the observations should be the duration of the episode.

Introduction to Hell's Kitchen

The following research and analysis were collected from season seventeen of the unscripted reality television series *Hell's Kitchen*; the reason is to be able to analyze the contestants appropriately with an already established reputation and culture. This study was conducted in a span of a week with each observation—one episode long (approx. 40 mins)—from the point of view of a complete outsider, someone who was entirely new to the cooking show realm. My observations occurred between the dates of September 4, 2023, and September 9, 2023, with the primary purpose of the study being to examine and reflect upon how the relationships of contestants affected their overall performance and success. In this specific season of *Hell's Kitchen*, there were sixteen “all-stars,” contestants who had been on the show once before. Since I was analyzing relationships between contestants, it made sense to pick a season in which some contestants had already forged previous relationships; this allowed me to better make analysis and assumptions regarding most contestants. The show itself is broken up into two teams competing against each other, along with multiple individual challenges to help save a contestant from elimination.

Most of the contestants on this show are middle aged men and women who have vast experience in cooking and have already been on the show. The teams are split up by gender, with eight men on the blue team, as well as eight women on the red team. The contestants are mostly white, with only 3 contestants of African American descent—one male and two female.

Initially, it seems like most everyone in Hell's Kitchen gets along well with one another with no real tension, except for the pleasantries at the beginning, in addition with normal competition adrenaline. As the first few competitions began, a tendency of conflict began to form between Gordon Ramsey and the woman's team, culminating in Ramsey calling them,

“...Useless pieces of shit.” On the other side, apart from one contestant who suffers from illness, the blue team gets along very well, easily winning the first dinner service. Ramsey has long been known for his vulgar vocabulary and it is implied that if you are working with him, you take the insults and move on. Further, it is also implied that contestants do not criticize or talk about one another’s dish. If someone were to talk about another contestant’s dish, the contestant would lose all respect among the cohort. *Hell’s Kitchen* has long been a show where insults play a large part in what goes on during the competition and overcoming that seems to be a key part in performing better.

Dinner Service

The dinner service is a high stakes competition in which both teams compete against one another to provide the best service to an entirely sold-out restaurant. Along with that, they will provide chef’s tables to two special guests. The way the service is set up, each contestant has a specific station, including appetizers, meats, starters, etc. The dinner service is a competition with immense weight, that raised the pressure and tension on both teams; a bad individual performance could signify a loss at that specific service along with elimination from the competition altogether.

Red Team Performance & Mistakes

Immediately after the commencement of the dinner service, the red team practically fell apart. They began yelling at one another, hurling expletives such as, “What the fuck are you doing,” and “You couldn’t cook to save your crappy life!” These insults visibly affected the team, with the recipient of insults dropping their body language. My analysis shows that although the team was supposed to be competing against the others, they seemed to be

competing against each other more than anything. As the service wore on the tensions increased massively, and their performance showed. For one of the appetizers, a carbonara pasta was ordered, and Barbie, an extremely experienced chef, who it is implied knows how to make a carbonara pasta, undercooked and then overcooked the pasta, much to the dismay of Chef Ramsey. Further, two contestants, Robyn and Elise oversaw making meats. With the service well underway, they began very strongly, but as the service wore on, the tensions flared causing insults to be shared, including a dig at Elise from Robyn, calling her, “a useless shithole,” very clearly showing how much the red team were struggling to work as a team. It became so apparent that these two contestants were going against each other, that Chef Ramsey had to step in and send one of the men from the blue team to help catch them up. Finally, one of the contestants who oversaw seafood, gave the salmon wrong four times, to which Chef Ramsey disqualified the entire team, sending them away effectively making them the losers of the dinner service for the night.

Blue Team Mentality, Praise, & Performance

Unlike the red team, I noticed right off the bat how together the blue team were much more comfortable from their body language as well as little words of praise to each other. They used words such as, “Great job,” and “That looks freakin [sic] amazing!” It was clear they really understood the fact that now they were not competing against each other. Instead, they seemed to rally around each other, earning compliments from Chef Ramsey himself. “Now that’s how you cook a steak!” “This salmon looks perfect!” It was evident as I watched along that the blue team cared about winning more than their own performance. I saw that this mentality was most evident when one of the contestants, Benjamin, who suffers from diabetes, was not feeling very well. He was visibly ill and could not really hold his own in the service that night. Instead of

leaving him behind, the rest of the blue team helped him pick up the slack, allowing the team to keep the flow and great performance going. Ultimately, the mentality of the team helped them stay afloat and perform incredibly well during the service. The blue team's mentality and praise from each showed a more developed relationship between each other, and it was evident in the way they outperformed the red team, taking home the victory.

Individual Competition

The individual competition provided the contestants with a way to compete against everyone else on a much smaller scale. The competition consisted of a specific type of dish the contestants needed to make with a smaller scope of ingredients. These smaller, individual competitions seemed to be the most important of them all because the winner of the competition would save themselves from elimination and have a greater say on who got eliminated. During judging, the sous chefs who manage most of Chef Ramsey's restaurants chose the top four dishes from each team to be tried by Ramsey himself. This allowed for Ramsey to only have to try the top eight dishes, sending the pressure through the roof. Although this competition was individual, the development of relationships was still in proportion to performance, with a better relationship with the judges/sous chefs leading to a better performance in this specific competition.

Judge & Contestant Interaction

The individual competition provided a chance for there to be constant contact between the contestants themselves as well as with the judges. During the competition, there was a palpable increase in tension among the contestants as well as a lack of respect between each other. For example, when multiple contestants were working near each other, they focused most of their time hurling insults trying to bring other down rather than their performance. Insults such

as “You’re a shit cook,” caused a lapse in concentration allowing those who were not a part of the insults a chance to perform better with less distractions. If the relationships you had with your fellow chefs was one where there were insults thrown, it was evident that it negatively affected their performance throughout.

Once the actual competition was over and the top four dishes were chosen from each team, Chef Ramsey went one by one asking the contestants what their dish was, breaking it apart piece by piece. Chef Ramsey was an incredibly tough critic of every dish, causing nerves from the contestants, proven by audible voice cracks and body tension. It was also noticeable that the more confident the contestant seemed to be about their dish and interaction with Chef Ramsey, the better score they seemed to receive; this was in direct alignment with the claim: if you formed better relationships with judges, you were likely to perform better.

Discussion

After watching the *Hell's Kitchen* television series for an extended period, I can conclude that the relationships between the contestants greatly affects their performance overall. As the competition wore on, and more relationships developed, the performances of the contestants depended on how the contestants on the teams treated their companions. Although I think that the show writers have heavy influence on what goes on, the contestants also “decide their own fate” with the way they treat the people around them and the judges as well. Additionally, I concluded that the contestants who had some sort of conflict, such as Barbie and Elise, focused more on outperforming each other than trying to win the competition. I saw that if the contestants really treated each other well, it seemed that they wanted and were more willing to work together. With that being said, the judges seemed to be harsher on the contestants who were not as respectful

with one another, hence my conclusion being that the relationships developed affected overall performance greatly.

This matters because it shows that in whatever discipline you make work in, the relationships that you develop directly correlate to how you perform. For example, should you be a soccer player: the better, and more developed your relationship with the coaching staff is, the better your performances turn out to be. Bigger picture, this shows that one should not be the person to hurl the insults, but be the bigger and better person, allowing yourself to develop something meaningful, performing better in the process.

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