

RESTAURANT

WHAT SUCCESSFUL

PROSPERITY

RESTAURATEURS DO

FORMULA™

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Advantage®



CHAPTER 1

DREAMS ARE MADE TO ORDER

“Suck it up, buttercup.”

That was all I got. I’m not sure what response I was searching for—but that certainly wasn’t it. This was back when I was thirteen years old. A waitress stiffed me on my tips, and I went running to my mom, who was also my boss, whining about what happened.

“She didn’t tip me!” I bitched and moaned for as long as I could, desperately searching for *something* from her. It could’ve been empathy or understanding—maybe a little of both.

Maybe I thought she’d force her hand over the woman who ran off with my hard-earned money. I mean, I *was* the boss’s son. But none of those things ever happened.

“Suck it up” was all my mom had to offer. She listened to my rant for as long as she could stand, then looked me dead in the eye

and told me she wasn't going to do anything about it. Her only advice to me was "Work harder."

It's not about how many years of experience you have; it's about what kind of experience you have.

Hard work was the first life lesson I ever learned. Many of my earliest memories revolve around the hustle and bustle of the restaurant world. I went from serving as an underage dishwasher at Lombardi's, a local Italian restaurant,

to filling in as a dedicated laborer in our family business. As you'd imagine, being forced to juggle the fast-paced lifestyle that comes with running an independent restaurant was a lot for a young boy to deal with. Living in a world where your mom was your manager *first*, before any other role she served, was a tough pill to swallow. It wasn't until I got older and started to see what it meant to have thick skin that I really understood the value in those experiences.

Experience is always the best teacher. Unlike most people, getting into the restaurant industry wasn't a choice for me—I was born into hospitality.

Where most of us cherish childhood memories surrounding tire swings and beach vacations, many of mine involve tackling towers of dirty dishes. When I was coming up, dishwashing wasn't just a chore—it was an obligation. It was one of many responsibilities that helped sustain my family's business.

I was more than a son; I was an employee. A team member. My mom was more than a nurturing caregiver. She was a no-nonsense manager who didn't take any shit. Even to this day, she still reigns as the toughest manager I've ever known. As a teenager, I hated her unforgiving tactics. Now I realize she was molding me to confidently step into the cutthroat, high-intensity world of a restaurateur.

Ditching the Excuses

As a restaurant systems expert, I've had the privilege of working with restaurant owners from all walks of life. I've spent more than sixteen years perfecting my approach. Learning from restaurant owners, innovating systems, facilitating one-on-one coaching and training sessions—it's all earned me the right to call myself *the expert*.

Even before I realized my mission as a coach and trainer, before I learned the true meaning of those foundational values and principles instilled in me by my mom, before I found myself battling towers of dishes at Lombardi's, and before I figured out how to manage all the different personality types we encounter every day, I understood one overarching life lesson:

Excuses are useless.

Excuses weren't allowed in my family's restaurant. My mother worked her ass off from open to close, serving double duty as owner and manager, so she didn't have time for unnecessary shit. With me and my sister, you'd never see any sort of favoritism. For one, there weren't enough hours in the day to waste on coddling us. Number two, that just wasn't the way we were brought up.

If anything, my mom always pushed us harder than anyone else. If something needed to be done, we figured it out. I played whatever role I was asked. Dishwasher. Prep cook. Busboy.

Friar Tuck's Tavern gave me the confidence to excel in an environment that wouldn't allow me to fold. That was *our* business. A family business. Anything short of success wasn't an option. Under my mother's guidance, I developed the skills I needed to elevate in every possible area. Because of those foundational values and beliefs, I developed a remarkable reputation for myself everywhere I've worked since then.

I was always the youngest person sitting at the top of the food chain. I always kept my competition, friendly or otherwise, on their toes. Everyone has always kept one eye keenly focused on me. And that's largely because when it's time for me to work, I work—and cut out all the excuses.

If you can promise to do the same, I'll do all I can to provide you with the tools you need to whip your restaurant into tiptop shape. I don't care if you're operating your very first hot dog stand or if you have locations sprinkled across the nation—the founding principles you need to follow remain the same:

- Establish solid core values.
- Develop tailor-made operational systems.
- Train your people, and hold them accountable.

To make this work, you need to accept this challenge as a packaged deal. You can't master your restaurant's success without perfecting all three of these components. I don't care if you've been struggling in one area or if you think you've already mastered them all. By the time you finish this book, you'll know exactly what you need to do to run your business in a way that most independents can only dream of.

Chasing Failure with a Shot of Success

For the last two decades, I've traveled the corners of the globe speaking in front of audiences of all sizes. I've attracted a dedicated group of restaurateurs who rely on me to provide them with as much guidance and direction as they need to turn their businesses into well-oiled machines. Of all my years in the industry, and everything I've had my

hands in while I've been building this reputation, one of the greatest assets I offer my restaurant owners is the fact that I get it.

Between all the tools, training, and resources I've developed over the years, I'm 100 percent sure that the best thing I will ever lay out on the table is my unquestioned understanding.

I've been there and done that.

There isn't a single complaint, issue, dilemma, or cause for concern that I haven't experienced on my own. There's nothing you can share with me that I haven't already dealt with or successfully

coached a restaurateur through. I can promise results because I've developed a fail-proof set of systems that can carry any type of restaurant through whatever type of growth or market changes it may experience. And I've put it to the test time and again.

When you're done learning from me, you won't even need me anymore. But I'm not going anywhere. My number won't change, and you can still call me whenever you have a question. *Shit happens.* We all know that. But my systems are designed to teach you and your employees how to manage your own operation without depending on anybody.

I've seen how successful owners become after following my lead. I get calls and letters and emails from restaurant owners sharing their stories every single day. I know these processes work.

Are you ready to see them work for you? That's the real question.

Are you ready to put the past and the excuses behind you? Are you ready to wipe the slate clean and transform not just your operation but also your way of thinking? I plan to dig in and dig up everything that's prevented you from running your restaurant in a

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way that'll make it as profitable as possible.

The way my mom pushed me shaped my life forever. I used to think she was breeding me to be a good worker; now I understand that I was being coached to become an even greater leader.

The last few years have taught me something else about excuses. Do you know what they really do? Excuses mask the truth. That's what happened to me in college. I almost forgot some of the most valuable lessons my mother taught me. I was enrolled at Northeastern University, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't shake my ties to the hospitality industry.

I spent my holiday breaks hosting for a small restaurant behind Symphony Hall. I was working as the doorman at two bars; Maxwell Jumps was a bar right on campus with a small menu, and Seaside Grill was a restaurant and bar over in Faneuil Hall Marketplace in downtown Boston. I had a lot on my plate at the time. I was attending school on an athletic scholarship for rowing. When I stopped competing, I took a job as a doorman to earn some extra cash. I had two things on my mind: get a job in the industry and find an easy way to meet women! Hey, what do you expect? It was college. Can you blame me?

I will say this: back then, staying focused was even harder because the leadership I was under really sucked. I tried talking myself out of my interest in the industry. There wasn't any order or direction. Workers weren't being trained on what was expected of them. There weren't any systems in place. It was a mess.

Then, when I graduated from college, I worked as a restaurant manager for the Hyatt Regency on the Charles River for a very short time. It was so ugly there that—and I'm embarrassed to share this—it was the first and only time in my career when I actually walked off the job and quit without any notice.

I started to think hospitality just wasn't for me.

We all fight with the thought of walking away from it all. The chaos of the industry almost pushed me out the door, but for some reason, I just couldn't do it. I kept finding my way back.

Culture Is the First Course: The Coyote Springs Story

Let me be blunt. I'm not a chef—not in the least bit. I can pour you a stiff drink, but I can barely boil water without creating a mess. If you're looking for a leader to help you sauté and season, then I'm not your guy. Cooking may not be my forte, but I can open your eyes to something far more important to the success of your business.

I'm successful because with the right systems in place, I can run any kitchen. In the restaurant industry, culture outranks culinary expertise. I know some of you probably think I've lost my mind, but I'm standing on my word on this one. You'll see what I mean as you keep reading, but just think about this for a second:

You can whip up some of the tastiest food in the world, but if your restaurant is run with a bullshit culture, nobody's going to tolerate the atmosphere long enough to get plates on the table.

The love-hate relationship I developed with hospitality was mainly due to the crappy cultures I dealt with while I was coming up. Fortunately, I had the pleasure of working with one company that proved that poor culture was the exception, not the rule to follow.

Sometimes, we need to be pushed into our destiny. Hard

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work at my family's business and crazy experiences throughout my college career were only the beginning. My real "push" happened when I started working for a brewpub in Phoenix, Arizona, called Coyote Springs Brewing Company and Café. Thanks to the culture I witnessed there, I remembered how much I really loved the restaurant business.

Before I knew it, I was back behind the bar, and I must admit, I had bartending locked down. I was best in the world, and no one could convince me otherwise, not even now.

Here's a curveball for you: while I was coming up in the restaurant world, I started dipping my toes into improv comedy. Let me tell you, if there was anything that could tear me away from being behind the bar, it was the chance to step on stage and make people laugh.

I thought improv was going to carry me for the long haul back in those days, so I used bartending sort of like my stage beyond the stage. If I wasn't entertaining a crowd with one of my *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* bits, the bar gave me another audience that really loved me.

That was such a magical experience.

I'm still so grateful for the Garrards, the owners of Coyote Springs, for giving me that opportunity. What I witnessed was proof of how quickly a positive company culture can improve a restaurant's operations. It also lifted the veil on the flip side of that coin—a part of the story I never expected.

Bill Garrard was a retired banker who lived to work in his restaurant. Creating the best experience for his guests was all he ever focused on. He was lost in what I like to call the social worker leadership style, the approach for leaders who focus everything they do on the guest and their team. Social worker owners often ignore their numbers, which puts their restaurants on the path to have great Yelp

reviews and negative bank accounts.

So Coyote Springs gave me an opportunity to shift back into a management role. Working as a bar manager, while bartending for the thrill, was an experience in itself.

I was there. I was always ready to roll up my sleeves and jump in wherever I was needed, even if that meant losing some sleep to help cover babysitting the hood cleaners overnight or anything else you can think of. I was present. I showed up and was always focused on making things happen. To me, that was the only thing that mattered.

I was killing the game, serving as a restaurateur superstar. Things were moving along so well, Bill decided to pull the general manager (GM) to the side to say, “Bring David on as a full-time manager.”

The GM nearly had a heart attack and he was like “No freakin’ way! We don’t have the money for it.” What Bill said next completely ripped apart my perspective:

“If David does his job, he’s gonna pay for himself.”

How many of us are taught to look at our talent as an asset, a valuable contribution to the bottom line of the business? Even in my small role, Bill saw me as *human capital*. He knew giving me the space to expand my horizon would be equally beneficial. He trusted that I’d help scale up the business—and that’s exactly what I did, eventually being promoted into the operations manager position and overseeing our two locations.

Talk about the importance of company culture.

From there, I worked my way up the hospitality ladder until I was the director of operations for a franchisor of a sports bar chain with thirty-plus locations called Famous Sam’s Restaurant and Sports Bar. Then I was an instructor at the Scottsdale Culinary Institute, teaching management and human resources and wines and spirits. Life happened, and I ended up accepting an offer to head *back*

to Famous Sam's as the chief operating officer tasked to turn the company around from near bankruptcy to its ultimate sale. I worked in the midst of the action, behind the scenes, and just about every role in between. Today, I hold the greatest title I've ever maintained. Not because I am my own boss and run my own company. Not because I have an awesome family of amazing team players helping me along the way. Not because I've sat beside some of the most ambitious restaurant owners in the world and helped them see their businesses from a totally different perspective. Because I get to help.

I'm in the position to use my experiences to help independent owners materialize their goals. I get to help people build their legacies and operate their restaurants in a way that models day-to-day operations after the most successful chain businesses in the world.

As a restaurant industry expert coaching restaurant owners, operators, and managers, I have the opportunity to sit down with regular people and make their wildest dreams come true. Now, in this book, I am sharing this information to give you the same perspective and support.

Following the Message

I'm going to show you how to use systems and tools just like the ones chain restaurants use without losing your independence. My advice is outlined through a detailed, step-by-step synopsis of what you should've been doing yesterday if you want to keep your restaurant from continuously bleeding money.

First, we'll discuss the basic formula for success: systems. The profitability of your restaurant depends on how well you understand the need to have systems in place for *everything*. Nothing's too large or too small. Nothing's to be left to common sense. (Most people

don't have any anyway.) Systems give you power and freedom; they let you impose your will in your restaurant without the need for you to be there.

Once we get that key concept down, we're going to move into what everyone really wants to know—how to get the job done. I'm going to show you how to create the systems your restaurant needs. Before you're finished reading, you'll know exactly what to do to identify the most important systems for your restaurant. Then I'll show you how to implement them while holding your people accountable for their actions.

The process is simple, but it'll only work if you place some extra emphasis on that last line. You have to hold your people accountable. It's the only way the rest of the steps will work together to help you reconcile the small but costly mistakes that usually capsize most independent restaurants. With this book, I'm giving you the keys to restaurant success and laying it all out on the line. I'm not just showing you what's possible. I'm about to walk you through each step, giving you as much guidance as I can.

Restaurant Prosperity Formula™—What Successful Restaurateurs Do would've turned into a couple of volumes if I shared everything I wanted to share. So, to make sure you walk away with a truckload of information, I'm backing this book up with a series of webinars and training courses to help guide you through each step. I'll help you revise every facet of your business—from your core values to your budget. Now that you have this book, you officially don't have any room to make excuses anymore.

By the time it's all said and done, you'll know why you need these systems, how to use them, and how *easy* it is for you to succeed. Once you see how your business transforms when your systems are up and running—and working together—you'll wonder why the hell

it took you so long to get on board.

Don't get me wrong—this is work! Hard work. And a hell of a lot of it. The hardest part of this transition isn't what you may think. It's not controlling food cost or reducing your labor cost or even getting your freedom back—the hardest part of utilizing systems is getting people to use them every day. That's why company culture is the first thing I address.



CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- Ditch the excuses!
- Company culture defines your future success.
- This is hard work—but systems make it that much easier.