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Sharing Success: Thoughts from Tom Cortopassi

“Window into the Process”

As a hands-on businessperson, one of the toughest management principles for me to develop in my early career was the proper use of delegation. Learning to effectively delegate is what helps owners to evolve from a **manager** to a **leader** of their organization.

Delegation matters because your team cannot perform to their full potential if they must constantly seek your direction and approval for routine tasks along the way.

Because hands-on owners like me expect perfection, we tend to micromanage. *“If you want it done right, do it yourself.”* So, delegating is easy to talk about but hard to do.

Still, learning how to properly delegate is **freeing** for both the **manager** and **“the managed.”**

Managers are freed by gradually gaining more time to spend improving the business and by helping their teams achieve increasingly productive results.

Teams are freed to use their own best judgement and feel more empowered.

There are two sides to learning delegation.

For owners, it requires giving yourself permission to give up what **feels** like control. But if you are micromanaging routine tasks, you are sacrificing being able to control the rest of your business!

For team members, it requires training them “how” to make independent decisions within your guidelines. More importantly, it is critical to consistently explain the “why” behind what each guideline is meant to achieve.

For example, employees develop a better understanding of why consistent food preparation matters when they realize that it is **consistency** that brings loyal customers **back** for the exact premium flavors they fell in love with!

When each person has been trained and deemed ready, a leader must **demonstrate** trust in that person by allowing them to make a few mistakes along the way. You cannot hover over their shoulder, questioning every step.

The challenge for former micromanagers is our fear of the unknown – *“But what if the finished product/task is not done right!?”*

This is where the **verification process** comes into play. In our organization, I call this the “window into the process.”

In other words, whenever I handed over a new responsibility to someone on the team, I made sure that I still had visibility of the activity.

For example, one of my first jobs was purchasing and scheduling all the fresh ingredients that we needed to make

various sauces during our summer Fresh Pack Tomato Season. After eventually training my replacement on how to use our ingredient-demand model, I continued to monitor the system (from my computer) to ensure that everything was on track.

Early on, I spotted a small problem or two that allowed me to further educate this team member to some nuances of the process. As this person got better and better, I spent less and less time peering into my “window.”

Then, instead of trying to catch problems, I would periodically ask a question about an ingredient or a shipment. By doing this, I was able to reinforce the importance of this job and that I was still engaged in the process. Additionally, rather than assuming I knew all the answers, I demonstrated my trust and confidence in this person by asking for her perspective on upcoming situations.

So how does this fit into a restaurant context? Here is a real-world example.

A couple of months ago, our family went to dinner at a favorite ristorante and had a nice table near their open kitchen. Over the years, this restaurant has steadily grown in popularity and size.

I enjoyed watching the Chef-Owner perform the restaurant version of watching his “window into the process.” Every dish was taken to the counter area for the servers to pick up and deliver to the appropriate table.

We saw the owner periodically position himself at the pickup spot where he silently evaluated the final appearance of several dishes. Obviously, his cooks know he doesn’t check every dish. However, because he regularly checks **some**, they know how much quality matters to him.

Similarly, we also saw him helping deliver food to tables, greeting guests, and quietly providing positive feedback to employees along the way.

What was especially enjoyable was seeing how motivated and energetic his entire team remained throughout the evening! They really seem to enjoy working there. Given his ristorante’s ongoing popularity, it seems like a winning approach!



Until next time,
 Ciao!

Tom Cortopassi

Tom Cortopassi, President and Co-Owner



IDEA EXCHANGE FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURATEURS

BUSINESS BUILDERS: WORD OF MOUTH

Balancing Supply and Demand

At a previous location, a tiny kitchen paired with a huge dining room made it hard to keep up with occasional busy-night demand. A new location with a larger kitchen and smaller dining room helped owner Ryan Delmore better balance service supply and demand. As busy-night table delays disappeared, online reviews praised the improved service, and more newcomers began showing up. Now customers are more consistently satisfied, generating even more positive Word of Mouth!

Ryan Delmore, Owner
 Del’s Pizza
 Pismo Beach, CA

“Walking Billboards”

To help increase Word of Mouth, pizzeria owner Elizabeth Badami sells T-shirts with her pizzeria’s logo at a modest margin to encourage regulars

to serve as her “local billboards.” By far, her most popular Word of Mouth clothing items are logoed sweatpants printed with the slogan *“These are my pizza eating pants!”* While the shirts are popular, the pants sell out quickly every time!

Elizabeth Badami, Owner
 Mary Jane’s Stone Baked Pizza
 Monaca, PA



Upscale Jarred Desserts

To boost takeout sales (not kitchen labor), owner Will Grant started offering unique jarred desserts made by a local world-class pastry chef. Priced at \$8, the exquisite,

layered desserts feature delicate mousses, chocolate ganache, and exotic fruit preserves, topped with gourmet cookie crumbles. As Word of Mouth spreads, their sales continue to grow!

Will Grant, Owner
 Sourdough Willy’s Pizzeria
 Bainbridge Island, WA



Share your proven business-building tips and if we publish your idea, we’ll send you \$100! Your tip can deal with any aspect of your business as long as it has added to your success. While we would like to give you credit, we will respect your wishes to remain anonymous if you prefer.

SUCCESS STORY: WHOLLY STROMBOLI, FT. LUPTON, CO

In their upscale pizzeria, Melissa and Eric Rickman defied "conventional wisdom" introducing their rural Colorado community to the premium quality "New York Italian" pizza and pasta that Melissa enjoyed as a child. By focusing on great food and a warm, welcoming atmosphere, they have created a destination restaurant which also draws plenty of regulars from surrounding communities.

Located in a historic brick building downtown, their restaurant identifies each cozy table with famous "Big Apple" street signs. Even the stairway down to their 1920s-era "speakeasy" basement bar features the authentic cast iron railings and entrance signage of a NY subway station.

But by far, the food is the main attraction. Visiting East-Coasters regularly compliment Melissa's food as "tasting just like home." In fact, during Covid, takeout grew so quickly that they had to expand their kitchen to meet peak demand!



There are plenty of cheaper restaurants and taverns nearby. But instead of trying to be all things to all people, Melissa and Eric have specialized in featuring premium craft beers, higher-end wines, top-shelf craft bourbons and whiskeys, and the latest specialty cocktails.

To manage their ever-changing collection of premium adult beverages, Melissa and Eric have invested in digital iPad bar menus. Reflecting their building's historic vibe, each iPad is covered in a custom leather "book" cover. And like a book,

guests can "leaf" through the visually attractive menu pages.

From a pricing and inventory management perspective, the digital bar-menu system allows the restaurant to only display what's currently in stock, focus guests on particularly interesting offerings, and rapidly reprice items as needed.



For example, available on-tap craft beers can be adjusted as soon as individual kegs are emptied or added. Individual wines or bourbons can be added (and priced) in real time as they become available. Specialty cocktails can be spotlighted only when the skilled mixologist is available!

Keeping menus current also means that servers don't have to memorize which specialty wines or beers on a printed menu are "no longer available," since they can be removed as the last glass is poured.

While their premium beverage selection constantly evolves, Melissa and Eric have wisely kept

their **food** menu tightly focused on Italian specialties, like their signature stromboli, New York deli sandwiches made with premium meats and cheeses, and traditional pastas. That way, the "magnet" at the heart of their success remains predictably delicious customer favorites **which are not otherwise locally available**.

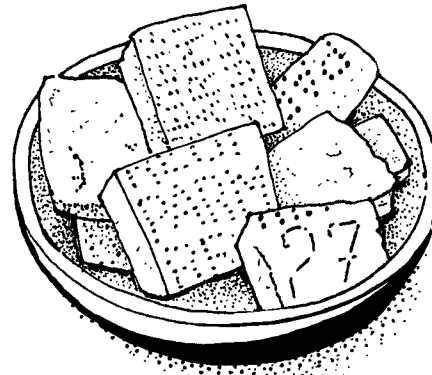
As a result of consistently attracting (and keeping) more quality-oriented patrons, they are further expanding their seating to keep up! Bravo!

LA VERA CUCINA: NONNA'S PASTA E PATATE

For Chicago restaurateur Pasquale DiDiana, his *Nonna's Pasta e Patate* is a favorite family recipe. As she would explain in very broken English, "Back in the war (WWI), they had no money, so they cooked what they could get their hands on, pasta and potatoes." As fortunes improved, the family gradually richened her recipe with "little extras" like diced prosciutto ends, Parmigiano Reggiano rinds, and smoked mozzarella. For Pasquale, the aroma of simmering potatoes and rosemary helps him recall her beloved voice!

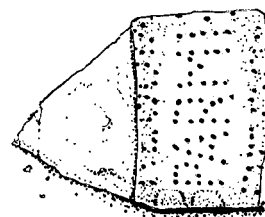
Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons Fall Harvest Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 whole clove garlic
- 1 Calabrian chili, chopped
- ¼ pound prosciutto end, finely diced
- ½ white onion, finely chopped
- ½ stalk celery, finely diced
- 2 pounds potatoes, diced
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1 branch fresh rosemary
- 6 leaves fresh basil
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
- ¼ pound Parmigiano Reggiano rinds, finely chopped
- 1 pound dry ditalini pasta
- 6-7 cups water
- ¼ pound smoked mozzarella, grated
- Grated Parmigiano Reggiano (garnish)



Instructions:

Warm oil in large saucepan over medium flame. Add whole garlic clove and chopped chili. Add prosciutto; sauté 4-5 minutes. Add onions and celery; cook until they soften. Remove garlic clove; add potatoes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sauté for 3 minutes; add water to make ingredients float like soup. Add rosemary, half of fresh basil, cherry tomatoes, and Parmigiano rinds. Once "potato soup" boils a few minutes, add pound of dry pasta. If needed, add more hot water as pasta absorbs it. Stir frequently until pasta reaches al dente. Add mozzarella and remainder of fresh basil; mix with wooden spoon. Cover and remove from heat. Let rest 5 minutes to become, as the *Napolitani* say, "azzeccata," thick and sticky. Garnish with grated Parmigiano; eat immediately while cheese is stringy.



About Parmigiano Rind

Unlike waxed cheeses, the outside protective rind of Parmigiano Reggiano is edible and should not be discarded! While it is too tough to chew, it still can add a beneficial nutty flavor to soups, sauces, and stews. Just scrape off the surface ink, chop or grate the rind, add to your soup during cooking and enjoy!

KEY IDEAS: DEEPENING COMMUNITY ROOTS

Over 17 years, *Solstice Wood Fire Pizza* has evolved to become a community cornerstone in Hood River, OR. From the beginning, owner Aaron Baumhackl's goal was creating a gathering place with great food to bring neighbors together.



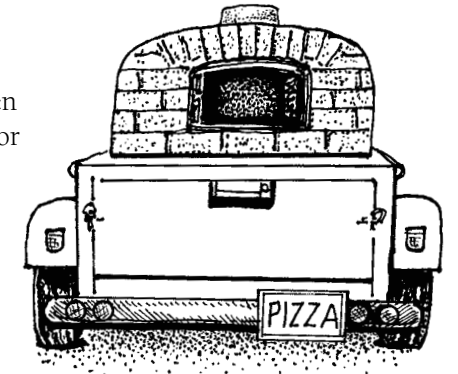
Back when he was still new to town and "too busy for a social life," Aaron began hosting the type of eclectic community events that he would enjoy attending. Reflecting the area's artistic vibe, Aaron invited local musicians, fire dancers, etc. to share their unique entertainment with Solstice guests. It worked!



Recognizing that young parents might visit the restaurant and its special entertainment more often if they could find childcare, Solstice began offering \$5 in-house babysitting on certain nights.



To further deepen its community roots, Solstice began using its mobile pizza oven at local community events to fundraise for local charitable causes. Aaron splits the proceeds with each organization on a sliding scale, depending on their need. Selling premium, freshly made pies at community gatherings has also helped more neighbors to try Aaron's unique food for the first time.

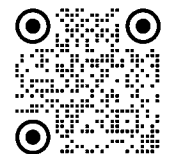


Over time, Solstice has also helped shape the region's self-image as home to specialty farms and craft food makers. The menu highlights its local specialty ingredients. Aaron also uses Facebook Live to enticingly describe his seasonal specials, while recommending the specific farms, farmers, and producers he discovers!

By gathering neighbors together, supporting local causes, and promoting local food artisans, Solstice has helped build a community of customers who feel especially connected to Aaron and his team!

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