

PLAY WELL WITH OTHER CONCEPTS (AND SAVE ON RENT)

STAY ON BUDGET AND OPEN A RESTAURANT WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS TO GO WRONG

MAY 2011

# Restaurant Business

MANAGE WITHOUT MICROMANAGING

GET CUSTOMERS TO LEAVE

STREET SMARTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR



TURN PEOPLE WITH NO EXPERIENCE INTO A KILLER STAFF

USE ONE OF THESE



# HOW-TO

## DEAL WITH COMMODITY PRICES

### GIVE FRANCHISEES A TEST DRIVE



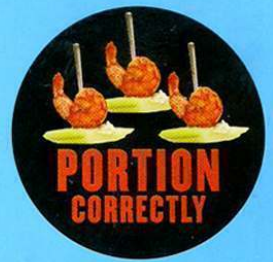
### MAKE EMPLOYEES LIKE EACH OTHER

TURN A MIS-POUR INTO A SIGNATURE DRINK



### DO A SUCCESSFUL TV COOKING DEMO

MEDITATE YOUR WAY TO STAFF UNITY AND STRESS RELIEF



HELP FRANCHISEES GET COMFORTABLE—AND MAKE MORE MONEY



CSP



# HOW-TO

 **GIVE FRANCHISEES A TEST DRIVE...**  **GET CUSTOMERS TO LEAVE...**  
**PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS (AND SAVE ON RENT)**  ...  
**MEDITATE YOUR WAY TO STAFF UNITY AND STRESS RELIEF...**  **DO A SUCCESSFUL TV COOKING DEMO...** **TURN A MIS-POUR INTO A SIGNATURE DRINK...** **DRIVE BUSINESS IN THE DEAD OF WINTER**  ... **TURN PEOPLE WITH NO EXPERIENCE INTO A KILLER STAFF...** **MAKE YOUR EMPLOYEES LIKE EACH OTHER... AND MORE!**

**Y**OU CAN'T LEARN EVERYTHING in culinary school. Or business school. Some lessons you've just got to learn on the job. With that in mind we set out to gather a little collected wisdom from the industry on how to do some of the more obscure tasks an operator might face. Challenges abound out there. Hopefully this will help get you through a few of them.

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BY PATRICIA COBE,  
JOAN M. LANG, TH STRENK  
AND KATHRYN HAWKINS





## GIVE FRANCHISEES A TEST DRIVE

**Y**ou've heard of taking a car for a test ride, but a franchise career? That's the premise behind the new franchise internship program at Moe's Southwest Grill, a fast-moving burrito chain that's been part of Atlanta-based FOCUS Brands since 2007.

"During the past year or so we've had a flood of interest from potential franchisees who had the financial chops and the interest, but couldn't be qualified because they lacked restaurant industry experience," says Paul Damico, president of the 400-plus-unit chain. "We figured that, unlike



liquidity, this was something we could solve."

So the Moe's team put together a program wherein these first-timers travel to Atlanta on their own dime and spend four weeks going through the ropes at one of Moe's four company-owned units there. "We put you through every position in the place, from production and customer service to handling cash

and janitorial," says Damico.

"While you're here, you're going to make the salsa, you're going to clean the toilets, you're going to talk to lots of customers, you're going to wash the floors at the end of the night and you're going to do it again the next day. At the end of the four weeks, we both have a pretty good idea whether you're for us, and we're for you." —J.M.L.



## GET CUSTOMERS TO LEAVE

**N**ew York City-based coffee shop operator Café Grumpy has gotten its customers to unplug the laptops and just buy and drink coffee. "People using their laptops change the energy of a space," points out Café Grumpy's co-owner Caroline Bell, explaining why she banned computers from the chain's Chelsea store.

Discouraging the "coffice" phenomenon was the strategy right from the opening of the second unit. The Chelsea store design omitted electrical outlets. When patrons fired up their laptops anyway, the owners banned computer use outright.

Now folks are actually conversing with each other, and customer counts increased.

"People said, 'How can you do that, ban laptops, you're going to lose customers?'" recalls Bell. "But I think we get more customers because if they can't find a seat right away they know someone will be leaving soon." —T.H.S.





## PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS (AND SAVE ON RENT)



THE COFFEE FOUNDRY

In New York's pricey West Village, The Coffee Foundry shares space with Karaoke Boho. During the day, the coffee shop brews up espressos. At night, the space transforms into a karaoke bar. The two businesses split the rent.

"Rents are expensive in Manhattan," notes Coffee Foundry owner Wilson Park. "This helps us both by



KARAOKE BOHO

maximizing the space."

From 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., the entire space is set up for the Coffee Foundry. As a plus, the 18 private karaoke rooms can be rented out to customers as mini offices or for conferences. At 7 p.m., cocktail glasses replace cups and saucers, and the karaoke bar takes over.

—TH.S.

## MEDITATE YOUR WAY TO STAFF UNITY AND STRESS RELIEF

Caring for the staff is the most important thing in creating a successful restaurant," states Junoon executive chef Vikas Khanna. "In a restaurant there is a strong, powerful energy that can be extremely negative." Meditation is a good way to let go of this energy, believes the chef. That's why a space was set aside at Junoon, an upscale Indian restaurant in New York, for employees to meditate and practice yoga.

While studying at an ashram in India, Khanna was inspired to apply some of his learnings to the Western business model of a restaurant. So when he opened Junoon (the name means "passion"), the meditation space was set aside from opening day. "We had the space, and there is collective energy there." The meditation room also aids cohesiveness for the staff. "In most restaurants, the front [of the house] is the front, the back is the back with no common point; we never come together," points out the chef. In Junoon, that common point is the meditation room.

—TH.S.







## DO A SUCCESSFUL TV COOKING DEMO

**S**o you get the call from “Good Morning America” or “The Today Show” to come in and demo a dish from your restaurant. Panic may well be your first reaction. But once you get a grip, here’s how to come out looking like a star.

“Keep it simple and make it sizzle,” advises culinary media trainer Lisa Ekus about choosing a dish to demo. “Chefs tend to overcomplicate what they can do in three to four minutes—which is all the time you generally get for a live segment.” And take the “sizzle” advice literally—viewers should be able to hear the cooking process and see (a little!) smoke. Color, texture and seasonality are also keys to connecting to the audience. For example, one-pot braises look brown and unappetizing on camera, but the vegetables and herbs that go into the recipe can punch up the set and visually entice viewers.

Which segues into the next point: choose recipes that can be broken down into several components or steps that flow seamlessly. “Show the finished dish, and then demo one step or piece of it, explaining how you make the salsa for a plate of grilled fish, for instance,” says Ekus.

Ana Sortun, chef-owner of Oleana in Cambridge, Massachusetts, took a 10-hour training session with Ekus to get ready for a stint on national TV. She chose Shrimp Saganaki—a dish that showcased her restaurant’s Mediterranean menu. “Lisa recommends that you choose something you can do with clarity and confidence,” says Sortun. “And the more you prepare ahead and practice, the better you can streamline what’s important to show and say.” Adds Ekus, “figure out which steps you can skip without frustrating the viewers.”

Once you choose your demo dish, follow these steps to success:

### Step 1

● **BE HYPER-ORGANIZED.** Even if there’s a full kitchen on set, pack essentials that make you comfortable and might not be on hand—chef’s knife, cutting board, paper towels, etc.

### Step 2

● **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE SPACE.** Choreograph beforehand where the kitchen equipment is, where the host will be, where your ingredients and utensils are placed and where your hands will go.

### Step 3

● **UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.** “Don’t use language like ‘mis en place’ or ‘plate the food’ when you’re talking to home cooks,” warns Ekus.

### Step 4

● **KNOW YOUR MESSAGE POINTS.** What are you promoting? Your restaurant? A new menu or cookbook? Sortun incorporated the name of her restaurant by starting sentences with “At Oleana, we do it this way.” Since every second counts, try to get the plug in during the first minute or two.

### Step 5

● **INCLUDE ONE “AHA” MOMENT.** “Introduce an ingredient, recipe tip, technique or serving suggestion that’s unique—a take-away that will make viewers remember you,” says Ekus.

And what about pre-show jitters? Sortun recommends chewing gum. Just remember to remove it when the cameras start rolling.

—P.C.



## TURN A MIS-POUR INTO A SIGNATURE DRINK

**M**istakes happen, especially behind a busy bar. The bartender grabs tequila instead of vodka while making a martini, or forgets having already added the triple sec in the margarita and pours the orange liqueur a second time.

Duplicates are no problem: Just pour the drink off the ice and wait until someone orders another one. But Eric Pierce, bar manager at Kingston Station in Boston, turns the odd little orphans into an opportunity to experiment.

"I came up in the business working in small family-owned



restaurants where anything wasted would have been a big financial concern," says Pierce, who designed Kingston Station's cocktail list. "It's always been my way to save money. If I make a mistake that no one else wants, I try to make something better with it."

A pricey Woodford Reserve Manhattan accidentally made 1:1 with sweet vermouth became the basis for The Antiquarian, for instance, while some leftover ginger beer—normally used for Moscow Mules—combines with grapefruit juice, sloe gin and artisanal vodka for the signature Flying Dutchman. Pierce is also looking forward to the summer when he can put a Jamaican

Shandy on the menu, a legacy of accidentally mixing that ginger beer with regular beer.

—J.M.L.

## DRIVE BUSINESS IN THE DEAD OF WINTER

**P**oe's Kitchen at The Rattlesnake's rooftop patio makes it a popular destination for summertime diners—but when the weather in Boston turns foul, business typically slows at this Latin American-themed eatery. "In the winter, we often have snow emergencies, so no one can park on the streets," says Chef Brian Poe. "People stay home instead."

This year, Poe decided to build a wintertime buzz by hosting a multi-chef, sports-themed culinary event the week before the Superbowl. His "Burrito Bowl" invited seven of



BRIAN POE, LEFT, AT THE BURRITO BOWL EVENT HE HOSTED AT POE'S KITCHEN AT THE RATTLESNAKE





**JOSE DUARTE WAS THE WINNER OF THE BURRITO BOWL AND THE PINATA WAS HIS "TROPHY"!**

Boston's best chefs to compete in a burrito-making competition. Poe agreed to reimburse the other chefs up to \$100 for the cost of their burrito ingredients, which made the proposal an attractive concept. "Each chef chose a football team to name their burrito after based on the region he or she grew up in," he says. "They also focused their burrito ingredients around those famous in the region."

Tickets to the event, priced at just \$15, let attendees sample each chef's creation and vote on their favorite. All 200 tickets sold out weeks in advance. "All of the chefs promoted the event within their own restaurants, so word spread quickly," Poe says. The event's novelty helped it garner press attention, providing positive exposure for Poe's Kitchen and the seven other participating restaurants. —K.H.

## TURN PEOPLE WITH NO EXPERIENCE INTO A KILLER STAFF

**M**any restaurant owners search for employees with years of experience and training. Then there are Carla and Christine Pallotta, co-owners, sisters and executive chefs of Boston's Nebo Ristorante, who take the opposite approach. "People schooled as chefs want to build menus and come up with their own ideas," laments Carla Pallotta. "Instead, we chose to hire people without any experience."

"Most of our staff at Nebo start as dishwashers and work their way up," says Pallotta. "It's probably the hardest job you can do in the kitchen." Once workers have proven themselves as willing and able to learn, they'll have the chance to begin line cooking. The sisters teach them how to stretch pizza dough, prep ingredients, mix sauces and make their homemade bread.

If staff members are motivated, it

won't take them long to move up the ranks. "In two weeks, one employee learned every single thing in the restaurant line," says Pallotta. "If they take an active interest and work hard, we reward them right away. On the other hand, we can immediately tell if someone isn't motivated, and we'll let that person go."

Instead of placing job listings, Nebo seeks to maintain its family-like atmosphere by recruiting the friends and relatives of their existing employees. "We mostly hire people who our other cooks know," says Pallotta. "We ask them, 'Who do you think would be happy here?'"

Nebo's menu is based on the Pallottas' grandmother's food, making the restaurant and its atmosphere extremely personal. Says Pallotta: "We want our staff to feel like they're serving food from their home. It makes for a better team and a better environment." —K.H.







## MAKE YOUR EMPLOYEES LIKE EACH OTHER

If you have a happy crew, your revenues are better, people are more productive, and it's just more fun," says David Turin, owner of David's and David's 388 in Portland, Maine.

Turin focuses on building camaraderie among his staff in a number of ways—getting everyone together for staff outings, a party every fall, camping

trips and a bowling team. His most unique teambuilding initiative is his "Biggest Loser" challenge to help overweight crew members drop the pounds.

"If you like your own cooking, you have to do something to keep it off," says Turin. He opened his three-month challenge—underway now—to "Big Losers" who want to drop 25 pounds or more,

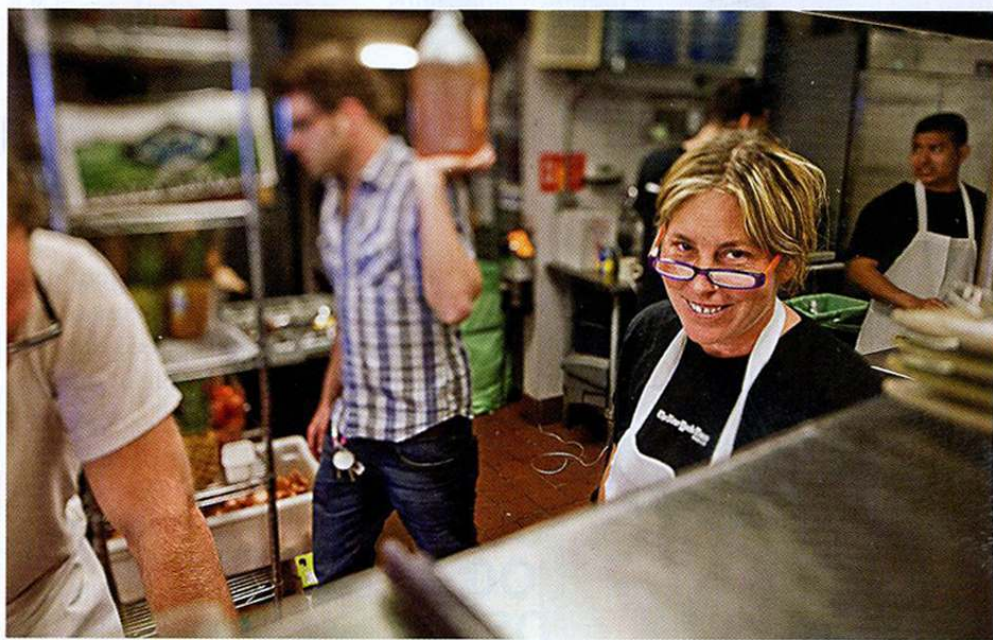
and "Little Losers," who want to lose less than 10 pounds. Participating crew members weigh in weekly, and the employee who has lost the most weight (as a percentage of his or her total weight) receives a prize. At the end of the challenge, Turin will pay up to \$1,000 to "Losers" who've met their goals and kept the weight off for an entire month. —K.H.

## MANAGE A GROWING COMPANY WITHOUT

### MICROMANAGING

Marilyn Schlossbach launched her first restaurant, Labrador Lounge, in 2002. Since then, she's opened five more eateries along the Jersey Shore. The growth has been overwhelming. "When I was a one-woman operation, I was in the kitchen every day and had my own system," Schlossbach says. "Now I manage 150 employees. How do I get them to listen to me and get everything done within a set time frame?"

To keep her employees on their toes, Schlossbach schedules weekly group meetings with the managers and marketing staff of all five restaurants. At each meeting, she briefs her staff on new projects and checks their progress on current work. "A project might be anything from a catering event to a Facebook page to a Mardi Gras party," says Schlossbach. "We use a lot of tools—Excel spreadsheets, Google Groups and other free pro-



SCHLOSSBACH AND HER CREW AT WORK

grams—to keep everyone accountable."

At each meeting, everyone reviews the weekly "project schedule," which consists of a point-by-point agenda; a sheet listing the project participants and deadlines; and a detailed summary of the project. Each project has a "project lead" who holds the other staff members accountable and updates Schlossbach on their progress, so she is able to avoid

micromanaging every detail. This strategy also encourages employees to work together to develop creative solutions.

Schlossbach gets the best results from workers who dive into projects they're passionate about. "I want them to not only execute well, but to get something out of it," says Schlossbach. "When I force my employees to do something, it's aggravating for both of us." —K.H.





## HELP FRANCHISEES GET COMFORTABLE— AND MAKE MORE MONEY

**A**n informal mentoring program has helped new Penn Station East Coast Subs franchisees learn the ropes and learn from others' mistakes. "Because we have only two company-owned units, we rely on our more experienced franchisees to help newer people get up to speed more quickly," says Craig Dunaway, president of the 225-unit Cincinnati-based chain, which specializes in hot grilled subs.



TRAINING A FRANCHISEE  
AT PENN STATION EAST  
COAST SUBS

Dunaway cites a new franchisee who was formerly a McDonald's operator. "He was an experienced franchisee but he was struggling with our system," says Dunaway. "His answer to our attempts to work with him was always, 'McDonald's does it this way.' But our system works very differently."

So Dunaway's team put him together with another former McDonald's franchisee. "They understood each other; they spoke the same language and had the same issues," says

Dunaway. "Now we use our understanding of where all our franchisees are coming from to get them in the right mentoring relationships." —J.M.L.

**W**hen Don Koski took over as general manager of the Bedford, Texas, location of Twin Peaks—a 16-unit casual chain—six months ago he was tasked with correcting a 3.2 percent food cost overage. Here's what he found when he started looking:

**1.** Fry portion sizes were off by as much as 2 to 3 ounces per serving. The problem was, in their rush to get the orders out, the crew wasn't weighing the fries and resisted doing so because of the time concern. Koski found a blue bowl—already in use for soup and chili—that careful testing proved was the exact size of the target portion. Problem solved.

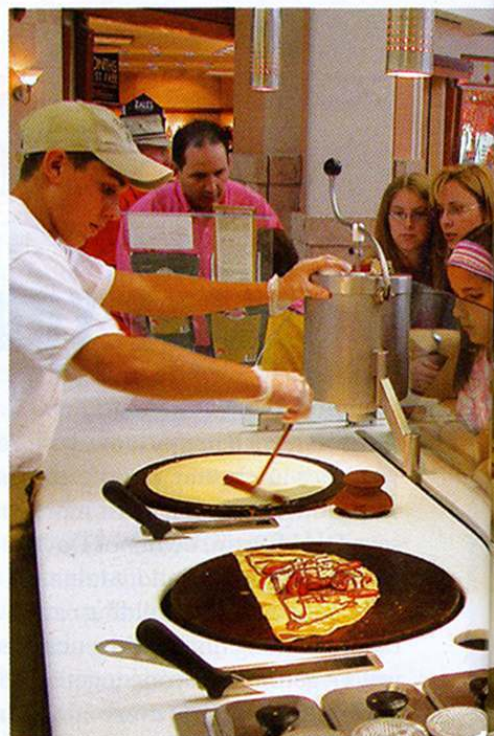
CUT  
FOOD  
COSTS,  
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AT A  
TIME



**2.** During that process he found that the fryers were being turned up too high to try and speed the process along, and the life of the oil was compromised.

**3.** A similar exercise with the top-selling pork nachos turned up all kinds of overuse errors, once Koski deconstructed the dish and evaluated every part of it, from too much barbecue sauce to the wrong size ladle for the pork. "Guys were trying to get plate coverage and were doing things like cutting off the tip of the squeeze bottle for the sauce," he explains.

Food costs at Bedford have dipped more than three points, and Koski's not done yet. —J.M.L.



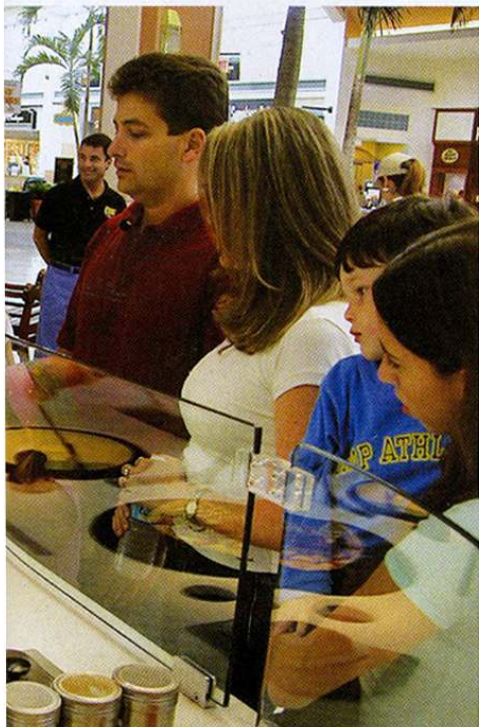
## BUILD A BETTER BATTER

**T**o create a made-to-order crepe concept that could be operated by one person and without the benefit of a traditional kitchen, the management of BannaStrow's faced a number of different challenges, but none was more pivotal than how to handle the batter.

It went without saying that it had to be neutral in flavor, in order to accommodate a rotating selection of more than 50 different fillings both sweet and savory, ranging from Thai Chicken and Smoked Salmon to the signature Fruit Jumble, filled with chocolate sauce, bananas and strawberries.

It had to be easy to transport and store, a situation that was solved by using a dry mix that would be combined with water in a blender and whipped until frothy, then left overnight to cure. And it had to be kept refrigerated at all times yet kept in full view of the customer





and handy to the crepe griddles.

"The whole system had to be efficient in every way," says Mauricio Acevedo, CEO of the four-unit franchise, which operates in 12-ft. x 12-ft. freestanding kiosks but also can be translated to other locations. "Everything that will be sold in the unit for a week needs to be stored right onsite." That includes all the pre-cut filling ingredients.

Acevedo ultimately found a batter dispenser—not surprisingly, made by a French manufacturer—that can be kept cold using gel packs and mounted on a track behind the griddles. Pushed out of the way when not in use, the dispenser can be guided up right to the griddle. Large enough to hold batter for up to 60 crepes, the dispenser can be "recharged" with fresh cold packs and replaced with a backup kept in the under-counter refrigerator.

—J.M.L.



## FIGURE OUT THE LOGISTICS OF SERVING 500 TASTING PORTIONS TO A CROWD

**J**ohn Rivers, chef-owner of 4Rivers Smokehouse in Winter Park, Florida, is diligent about doing his homework before an event. He researches the number of guests expected, the other chefs participating, the dish each is preparing and other variables. The signature of his down-home BBQ concept is smoked brisket, but "I can't just do a brisket slider if I'm competing with a group of high-caliber chefs," he says. At this year's celeb-studded Bubble Q during the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, he upped the ante by serving two items: a brisket bruschetta topped with tomato jam and sided by a cheese grit square and a banana cream dessert. He even brought his own smoker to cook the brisket overnight. And at this meat-heavy event, his dessert sampling was a big hit.

Rivers has worked out a formula to figure out how many tasting portions he needs at large events. "If the promoter tells you there will be 1,000 attendees, I factor the number down by 20 percent to 800. Then I



JOHN RIVERS SERVES THE CROWD

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divide that number by those vendors serving a similar food. At the Bubble Q, that turned out to be eight, which gave me 100 portions. But then I added 30 percent to that

figure to come up with 130," he explains. Although it's not exact, Rivers' formula meets the dual challenges of too little food and too much waste. —P.C.



## HOW TO STAY ON BUDGET AND OPEN A RESTAURANT WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS TO GO WRONG.

**W**hen Sally Chironis started construction in April 2010 on the "vanilla box" that was to become La Silhouette, a high-end New York City French restaurant, she planned to open by Labor Day weekend. "I signed a contract that specified the work would be finished in 90 days," she recalls. "But then the contractor went out of the country and left his workers behind with no supervision. They had no idea how to put in a kitchen or finish the job."



LA SILHOUETTE'S INTERIOR: A VANILLA BOX NO MORE

September rolled around and Chironis had her architect fire the original contractor and find a new one. "This time, I put a penalty clause in the contract to protect myself," says Chironis, "but I had to increase my construction budget by 25 percent, which cut into my working capital." She also had to absorb the expense of keeping her staff on board from September on. Worst of all, La Silhouette was now scheduled to open in January—the slowest month of the year.

But open it did, in the midst of a prolonged recession and record-breaking winter cold. La Silhouette got off to a slow start, but Chironis did a number of things right to get the business thriving.

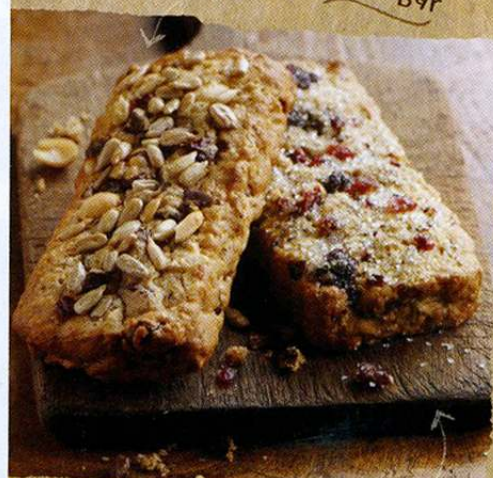
- **CUSHIONED HERSELF** with enough capital to pay vendors, staff, etc.
- **CHOSE STAFF MEMBERS WITH A "PEDIGREE"** Chironis cut her teeth at Le Bernardin; the chef comes from Restaurant Daniel and the pastry chef from 11 Madison Park.
- **HIRED A PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANY TO HELP PROMOTE THE OPENING.** Good press and excellent dining experiences created lots of positive buzz in the foodie community. By March, La Silhouette became a top 10 Diner's Choice Winner in Open Table's category of Best French Restaurants-Manhattan.
- **WATCHED THE BUSINESS LIKE A HAWK.** Chironis is at the restaurant seven days a week to nurture "her baby," attend to phone calls and inquiries and extend a personal touch to guests. "Every person who comes in is a critic and deserves to be treated the same," she believes. —P.C. □

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