

Young At Heart

**Legendary Hollywood icon, George Burns, once said,
"Everyone has to get older but that doesn't mean you have to be old..."**

The key to food service success is youth. I don't mean chronological youth. I mean staying young at heart. I mean being open-minded. I mean embracing change.

We all know a seventy-five-year-old who is open-minded, energetic, highly spirited and passionate about his work. We also know twenty-five-year-olds who are closed-minded, tired, negative and blasé about their work. Youth is a state of mind.

Our food service industry is mature. Our business is relatively flat and we have challenges galore. Each food service operator faces competition from both traditional and non-traditional sources and a wide range of challenges galore. Government legislation, workforce challenges, consolidation and a changing dining guest are just a few of the issues operators face everyday in their businesses.

By being open-minded... and embracing fresh, innovative, new ideas, an operator will flourish and survive. After all, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." The key to capitalizing on change is youth. Stay fresh, vibrant, energetic and young.

Consider that children color outside the lines, invent games, invent rules to those games and they're happy as a lark. On the other hand, we, as card-carrying adults, are typically reserved and reluctant. We oftentimes meet change and challenge with a conservative positioning. Rather than being "young at heart" and meet change head-on with gusto, energy and spirit, we sit back and bemoan the plea, "This is not the way we've always done it..."

There are only three things you can do with change, namely, **Ignore it. React to it. Make other changes.**

If you ignore change, you'll shrivel up and fail. Think about the "great" businesses that no longer exist because they ignored change. Where is Eastern Airlines? Hey, they were the number two American carrier and the number four international carrier... and today they no longer exist. Ignore change and you die!

If you simply react to change, you'll survive. "Survival" is certainly good (and better than the alternative), however, food service operators shouldn't just focus on "surviving" as much as on "thriving!" Adapting, adjusting and reacting to change is healthy but it still won't get you the gold ring.

Here's the strategy... Here it is. If you want to succeed in times of change and challenge, make other changes. That's right. Be a change catalyst, a change agent... a mater of change. Peter Drucker wrote, "If you want to predict the future, create it." Be young. Be creative. Be innovative. Be a change master!

Youth is all about being a change agent and being a change catalyst. As the song goes, "Stay... forever young."

In the food service business, we tend to be paralyzed by our old rules. Ask any food service operator why they do something a certain way and the likely response is, "That's the way we've always done it." That's old world thinking... not new world positioning. . .and certainly not "being young."

Consider that every work of art, industry and science came about because someone looked at the world differently. The key to success is to embrace new, fresh, young ideas. . .and have lots of spirit and energy.

Question and challenge everything in your operation.

Media mogul Ted Turner met all kinds of resistance when he tried to peddle his idea that twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week news was a big idea. He believed in the concept, fought for the principle and today his CNN creation is not only a reality... but has changed the way we view news.

Henry Ford met incredible resistance with his horse-drawn carriage, Ray Kroc met the same with his drive-through restaurant concept called McDonald's, Sam Walton met similar resistance with his "national brands at everyday low pricing" formula for Wal*Mart and the stories of innovators who embraced youth and new ideas fill shelves in bookstores around the country.

Innovate, don't imitate. Think about things you can do with/for your operation that "seem" unrealistic but "if" you could accomplish, would dramatically change your business results. Take a shot. NHL hockey legend Wayne Gretzky once said, "I miss 100% of the shots I never take!"

In closing, focus back on that old classic line from an old classic song,
"Fairy tales can come true... it can happen to you... if you're young at heart."

Everyone has to get older but that doesn't mean you have to be old.

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