

There is no love sincerer than the love of food.

- George Bernard Shaw



So, You Want to Open a Restaurant?

"There's a million and one components, and when you think you're done you haven't even started." ~ Leyla Marchetto

Leyla Marchetto has a lot on her plate. Literally. An owner of [Scuderia](#), the hip Italian eatery set to open in Greenwich Village by Spring 2009. Leyla has been frantic over details in preparation for the opening meal. From countless menu tastings to appointments with inspectors, contractors, designers, gardeners and welders, it's been nearly impossible for most people to reach this bionic woman (who, by the way, sleeps with her Blackberry in case of an urgent late-night message). Yet I had the privilege recently of chatting with her over a delicious lunch at [Da Silvano](#), her father's ever-famous restaurant on Sixth near Bleecker, right across the street from Scuderia's future stomping ground. I even got a chance to go beyond the "Keep Out" sign at the construction site!

The four owners---Leyla, her father Silvano, musician Fabrizio Sotti and former Da Silvano general manager Alessandro Bandini have a solid partnership based on respect and communication; they couldn't have picked a better name than Scuderia, which can be translated into "team," the key word for success--especially in today's precarious economy.

Leyla, a [Georgetown](#) graduate who has worked on hotel and entertainment projects on both the east and west coasts, divulged her secrets to starting a restaurant and striking the balance.

Alright, Leyla. Let's say I want to open up a restaurant. What's the very first step? What are the rules of thumb?

-Refine your concept. Write up a business plan (both text and financials). Make sure it will work in the area in which you plan to open the restaurant.

-Do Your Homework. Research the area and competition in that area to determine if it is the correct demographic and location for your concept.

-T-E-A-M Work. Put together a team whose skills complement each other. You should have 1-2 people with hands-on restaurant experience who know what to do AHEAD of time to avoid mistakes, delays, unnecessary expenses, etc.

-Access your funding opportunities, including friends and family, venture capitalists, etc.

-PLAN AHEAD for all elements of the project - from build-out or renovations, to permits and licenses for

construction, liquor, sidewalk cafe if applicable...

-Create a calendar to make sure you have a plan as to what needs to get done when, and by whom.

-DEFINE and DELEGATE responsibilities so no one can say that "that wasn't my job".

-Pinpoint a location and make sure to negotiate for the best possible lease agreement.

-Hire your chef if he is not already a part of the team, and begin costing the menu options.

-Plan all smallwares and miscellaneous items for the restaurant for both back of house and front of house.

-Move quickly and efficiently in working towards completing all goals.

-Negotiate contracts with your food and liquor vendors.

-Be vigilant. Keep a close eye on all the moving parts from the opening and on, since you, as an owner, should be aware of EVERYTHING that is going on at all times.

-It's a Long Haul. The restaurant business is synonymous with long days and longer nights. Indulge in dialogue with your customers, friends and family to access and refine your concept, menu, etc this enables you to create and maintain a venue with a strategy to compete with the finest.

So, I've got the idea of opening your restaurant. Now, how do I go about applying for permits?

You can either hire an expeditor to handle these, or you can handle them yourself. You will save money handling them yourself, but if without experience, you may lose time and money making mistakes, missing deadlines, etc. Try and factor in the expeditors fees if possible.

What is a rational strategy on how to delegate responsibilities among my staff?

Write, review and sign your operating agreement (between owners) clarifying your own responsibilities. The next step is to have your Managing Partner and/or GM or Director of Operations (depending what kind of restaurant or company you have) define roles and tasks from pre-opening through soft-opening, launch, and official opening. Publish a Policy Manual specific to your restaurant, and include detailed job descriptions that employees will read and agree to once hired. Training Manuals are great tools that keep operations smooth and stress-free. Communicate, plan and organize.

Leyla, please share your thoughts on staying efficient and organized.

Write it all down -- with dates. Highlight tasks as they are completed and note the next steps. Purchase a Blackberry and keep all of your emails and contacts in order so you can reach anyone at anytime from anywhere! Timing is crucial; you can't afford to miss important phone calls or emails...

How do you establish trust among partners? How can you be sure?

Ideally, businesses are built on trust. But people do change, "things happen," and conflict or distrust is often present. Be sure that you have checks and balances in your operating agreement so that conflict can be resolved.

How might business partners improve and uphold the lines of communication?

Partners should have frequent scheduled meetings or calls to keep updated. A point person should send minutes to all the partners regarding the process and status of the project.

Earlier you mentioned "networking" and how valuable it is to know restaurateurs and chefs because their advice and mentoring saves time, money and tears. How does someone new to the restaurant business develop a network? Where and how shall they commence?

Yes, its great to have friends in the biz that you can rely on for some direction or advice, or even just to connect you to vendors, etc...If you do not have that base, you can reach out to friends and family about anyone they may know. Join your local business association, and any relevant restaurant associations. If you can, you should definitely work in a restaurant before you decide on your own. It is a HUGE endeavor and you should be sure that you handle it before investing time & money in it.

What are some lessons you've learned in this process? What are some "words of wisdom" you might offer to aspiring restaurateurs?

Again, plan ahead. I cannot stress that enough. Everything takes longer than you expect especially when construction is involved. Allow yourself extra time for everything! Make sure your family and friends realize that your time will be hugely occupied by your project, and tell them not to take your absence from other activities personally!

DO try to set aside sometime for yourself--exercise, turn your Blackberry off when you go to sleep (occasionally), stay healthy; you will need all of your energy to get through the pre-opening, soft opening, and official launch phase. Perhaps even more.

Be positive. Keep your eyes and mind open. Try and transform pitfalls and mistakes into opportunities to troubleshoot and re-strategize.

We at Behind the Burner thank Leyla for sharing her tips, tricks and techniques to starting a restaurant business. Stay tuned for the launch of Scuderia NYC, featuring eye-catching modern décor, an original soundscape by guitarist and co-owner Fabrizio Sotti, and locally-sourced Italian comfort foods that echo back to Tuscany, Venice and Florence. Each dish will be prepared freshly by Claudio Cristofoli, the celebrated former Executive Chef of Cipriani Downtown. We'll keep you posted!

Photo courtesy of **Max deCherchi**

— *Written by Danielle Travali, January 7, 2009*