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WOMEN IN THE LEAD: 2019

International Women's Day: 27 female restaurant execs who have made it to the top

March 8, 2019 | by [Cherryh Cansler](#)



Editor's note: This is part 1 of a two-part series featuring females executives leading the limited-service industry. Part 2 will feature 13 interviews.

Happy International Women's Day! To celebrate, FastCasual has released its third annual "Women in the Lead," series featuring some of the industry's most innovative and successful female leaders. We chatted with 27 women who have worked hard to make it to the top of the corporate food chain, especially the c-suite, which, unfortunately, still lacks in female representation. It's not just a restaurant industry problem, however.

Although women earn more bachelor's degrees than men and ask for promotions, negotiate compensation and stay in the workforce at the same rates as men, they're less likely to be hired for manager roles, according to "Women in the Workplace 2018," a report by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org, which studied the entire workforce in the United States. Female workers also face a

bigger gap when it comes to being promoted into management roles. For every 100 men promoted to management only 79 women are, and it's worse for women of color.

"Most notably, for every 100 men promoted to manager, 60 black women are," the report found.

These gender gaps leave us with men holding 62 percent of management positions, while women have less than 40 percent. Female workers in the restaurant industry, however, have a higher representation in management positions than they do in the overall economy, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which found that 46 percent of foodservice managers are women. Only 39 percent of all management occupations in the economy are held by women.

"Women represent 53 percent of the nation's restaurant industry workforce and have a higher representation in management positions than they do in the overall economy," Dawn Sweeney, president and CEO of the National Restaurant Association, said in an interview with FastCasual. "We must continue to lead the way and provide a chance to succeed to all who join our industry."

Although there aren't yet stats out to prove it, the restaurant industry seems to be embracing female leadership now more than ever. When I first started this series [three years ago](#), it took quite a bit of effort to find enough female leaders to feature. That's no longer an issue, and it also seems that I'm writing more frequently about females being promoted to the c-suite. ([Read last year's series here.](#))

It makes sense, considering that the business case for gender equity is well established through a deep body of research revealing that gender-diverse organizations drive better decision making and stronger consumer insights, win the war for talent and are more profitable, said Hattie Hill, Women's Foodservice Forum President and CEO.

"... This an especially important time to nurture our next generation of leaders who will guide the food industry to its bright future," she said in an interview with Fast Casual.

Fully bridging the gender gap in the U.S. labor market would add \$4.3 trillion of additional annual GDP in 2025, according to the McKinsey Global Institute.

"I believe the restaurant industry is realizing that gender diversity could be a key to any brand's success," Slim Chickens Executive Director of Franchise Development Jackie Lobdell, said during her interview with FastCasual. "Diversifying top positions is not just about leveling the playing field; it's about finally using the best resources they have available to capitalize on every brand's potential."

See below for the rest of Lobdell's interview along with Q and As from:

1. Jackie Lobdell, executive director of Franchise Development, Slim Chickens
2. Kristi Kingery, SVP of Supply Chain & Quality Assurance, Tropical Smoothie Cafe.
3. Michelle Bythewood, president, Salata Salad Kitchen.
4. Ursula Lane, senior manager of Franchise Recruitment, Checkers & Rally's.
5. Lauren Gruel, VP of Marketing, Slapfish.
6. Gwen Graham, president, Miller's Roast Beef.
7. Andrea Allen, chief accounting and administrative officer, Rave Restaurant Group.
8. Diana Holley, VP of Marketing, Willy's Mexicana Grill.
9. Donna Josephson, SVP and CMO, Corner Bakery Cafe.
10. Dennie Laney, VP of Training & People Development, Mooyah Burgers, Fries & Shakes.
11. Ali Rauch, director of Marketing, Chicken Salad Chick.
12. Jodie Conrad, VP of Marketing, Fazoli's.

13. Rachel Phillips-Luther, founder and CMO, Up Inspired Kitchen.
14. Christina Coy, VP of Marketing, Pie Five Pizza.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job in the restaurant industry was with Focus Brands as a Sales Director. My primary focus was generating leads, recruiting new business and negotiating franchise agreements.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

I believe the restaurant industry is realizing that gender diversity could be key to any brand's success. Diversifying top positions is not just about leveling the playing field — it's about finally using the best resources they have available to capitalize on every brand's potential.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I would definitely be in a National Sales Role in another industry. This is what I have done for my entire career and where I think I am most effective. I love the interaction with prospects and excel at developing strong relationships with my clients.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I have learned that I don't know everything, not even close. I try to learn from every single person I encounter. I have also learned to trust my instincts and most of all to believe in the brand I am representing. There is nothing more effective in sales than having passion and wholehearted belief in the brand/product you are representing.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

It's all about the customer. It's not about your fabulous product or how great your company is. That old adage, "Make a sale, you'll make a living. Sell a relationship and you can make a fortune," could not be truer. The focus should always be on the client and what's best for them.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job in the restaurant industry was with ARCOP, the supply chain co-op for Arby's Restaurant Group. I was a buyer on the procurement team and was responsible for the dairy, sugar and sweetener categories. I stumbled across the job opportunity when I applied for an executive assistant position through a recruiter and she suggested I consider the ARCOP role instead!

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

I believe that research has become more prevalent as to the direct benefits a company may see from promoting women into leadership positions. It's not about having women for the sake of having women. Women are biologically predisposed to certain characteristics that set them apart from men. There are equally different benefits that can be derived from both men and women in leadership — this is why diversity is so important.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

Since my college degree is in fashion design, I imagine I'd be working for myself in a more creative space. I really enjoyed doing freelance work as a costume designer when I was younger. That was also when having consistent income was slightly less necessary than it is now!

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec? So many things!

Most importantly, I've learned that you have to make time for yourself on a personal level. Even though I enjoy working and don't mind long hours, it's very important for me to take time to reduce stress by exercising and cooking healthy meals. I've realized that I don't have to feel guilty if I'm not productive every hour of every day. By taking time to recharge, I end up more productive in the long run.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

I wish someone had explained to me (sooner) the differences between an individual contributor and a manager/leader. I spent quite a few years prior to joining the restaurant industry treading water in

the same job. I was continually working harder, longer hours and doing more work and not understanding why my career was not progressing. It wasn't until I was at ARCOP that I gained the understanding that I needed to develop a completely different skill set to get on the career path I desired.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

I started my career in 1990, as a field marketing manager with Austin-based Schlotzsky's. I was a recent college grad with a BBA in marketing and was determined to find a true marketing position rather than going the sales route like many of my marketing-grad peers. I saw an ad in the paper (back in the day!), got the interview, and the rest is history. I've spent nearly 30 years in the industry and have loved (almost) every minute of it.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

I was fortunate to work with two strong women at Focus Brands who were able to break through the glass ceiling within their respective organizations. Kat Cole, COO and President of Focus Brands, and Heather Neary, President of Auntie Anne's, made an impact on me by leading with passion, humility and grace. Two smart, strong women who lead by example. It may still be limited for women at the top of many industries, but as women succeed in these roles it will open up additional opportunities.

We must now focus on developing the women we lead to take the next steps and be ready when opportunities arise. Additionally, women must be proactive by asking for what they want. I am in the role of president today because when my boss asked me where I saw my future, I told him I would be president of Salata. I planted the seed, and eight months later my efforts paid off as I was promoted to my current role.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I would be running my own company. I am the founder and owner of Field Marketing Focus, LLC., which I started in 2016, to help brands implement scaled marketing programs within their

communities to drive sales. I'm passionate about marketing on a local level as well as the connection between supporting communities and the people within them to directly impact the bottom-line. If I wouldn't have gotten so enamored with the restaurant industry, I would have started my own brand years ago.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I've learned that I am able to make tough decisions without second-guessing myself. I've learned that it is imperative to help develop everyone around me to reach their full potential, no matter what role they are in. And I've learned that if I don't 100 percent believe in a brand, I can't save it no matter how hard I try.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

At the risk of sounding cliché, to embrace failure and really learn from my mistakes. When I was a young professional, a failure, no matter how big or small, felt like the end of the world. I wish someone would have said you are going to fail a million times in your career, but what matters is how you react to those failures. Not only what you learned from them, but how you personally choose to react and conduct yourself.

You can sulk and feel sorry for yourself and listen to that negative self-doubt in your head or you can tell yourself you made a mistake, suck it up, and move on. I am very passionate about mentoring young professionals and have had the opportunity to guide many individuals over the course of my career. I don't sugar-coat anything when they ask me for advice. I tell them to get up, dust yourself off, admit why and where you went wrong, and get back on track. If you don't, someone else will and you'll be left behind. The choice is yours to make.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job in the restaurant industry was working as a cashier at the campus pizza cafe during my freshman year at the Georgia Institute of Technology. After starting my professional career in the automotive industry with Ford Motor Company, I am now charged with growing the franchise family at Checkers & Rally's. One could say, I've come full circle.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

All industries are recognizing the value of bringing diversity of thought, experience and leadership to the table. Successful leaders are not defined by gender but by those who get things done, listen to others, take risks, and learn from their mistakes. Strong women leaders possess all of these attributes and our male counterparts have taken notice. Women are leaders at all levels.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

Continuing my work with entrepreneurs and mentoring children and teenagers. It's fulfilling giving back and encouraging others to achieve their dreams.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

Because the restaurant industry is very dynamic, it has allowed me to continue to grow as a nimble and strategic leader. I utilize my marketing and advertising, franchising, PR and analytical experiences each day. The restaurant industry is truly about people, and I enjoy working with people.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

The importance of hard work, relationships and core values transcend industries.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job was catering for the USC alumni during every home game when I was 15 years old. That is where I fell in love with the hustle that is the restaurant industry.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

I think we are in an era where gender doesn't play a part in who does what. I think women are getting those positions because they are qualified to do so.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

Funny enough I would probably be a flight attendant! I love traveling, and I feel like that is a great way to explore the world.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I have learned that I am a lot tougher than I thought I could be. Saying, "no," is ok.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

I wish I would have known that making mistakes is a good thing, that is the only way one can grow. I was very hard on myself at the beginning of my career.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

Ironically, it was Miller's, 13 years ago. This was after many years of working in other industries. I always seemed to be on the search for where I was meant to be and looking for that sense of fulfillment. I knew from the moment I started at Miller's, made that first Roast Beef sandwich and saw the smile that our guests had each time they visited, this was what I had always been searching for. I can honestly say that I have truly found my passion — this is exactly where I was meant to be. Each day is different, and it never feels like "work."

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

I think as the years have passed there are more and more cultural shifts happening within organizations that have made it possible for women to obtain these positions. Women were always confident and capable of performing these jobs in the past, however now it is part of the cultural conversations within some organizations. These conversations are helping organizations recognize areas and situations from the past where they may not have chosen the best "person" for the job, but rather the best "man." Permanent change happens as a result of these continued conversations. Any type of societal shift takes time and certainly doesn't happen overnight. I think

it's a step in the right direction, however, there is still a long way to go, and there are many layers that need to still be pulled back and analyzed.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I would probably still be teaching. Education was one of my careers before joining the restaurant industry. It was the first time in my career where I felt I was truly making a difference. It provided an internal motivation and sense of fulfillment that I had not experienced. The franchise industry and hospitality as a whole also require the ability to lead, motivate and encourage people, which is a great bonus to what I am doing now.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

Self-reflection is something I practice daily. It allows me to really look at a situation and analyze whether or not I handled it correctly and identify ways to possibly handle it differently next time. This practice of self-reflection has allowed me to identify my strengths as a leader but also look at the areas where I could improve in order to make a better decision in the future. This has helped me to really understand that my learning will never stop.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

When I first started my career, I wish I would've known that it is 100 percent acceptable to rely on yourself and trust yourself. This came later in my career learning two little words, "trust yourself," earlier would've given me the confidence to rely on myself to make decisions. I felt the need to rely on other people's opinions and thoughts when making decisions. Now I know that I have the ability to make great decisions and if I make a mistake, it's okay — tomorrow is another day!



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My very first job in the restaurant industry was "bussing" tables during the summer when I was 10 years old. I worked for a popular lakeside restaurant called "The Old East End" helping the servers on busy nights. My first corporate job in the restaurant industry was at TGI Friday's in 2010, which led me to love of the restaurant industry at a deeper level.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive

roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

I believe women are really valuable contributors to the restaurant industry due to their attention to details and innate love of hospitality. Also, there is some great research that reports that women often have higher emotional intelligence, and in the restaurant industry and in leadership, that emotional intelligence can provide a great edge to be in tune with guest needs and employee dynamics.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

If I wasn't in the restaurant business, I would probably be in the non-profit sector. I have a big love of the non-profit sector and believe great administration and financial guidance can lead to greater service for non-profit goals and ministries.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

At earlier stages of my career, I believed that the environments and companies where I worked demanded long work hours. I have since learned that working long hours and driving hard are characteristics inside of me that I must manage. I own that now and realize it is critical for me to keep it in check, so I have to be very intentional to achieve balance in my life. My natural tendency is to put my personal needs to the side, which can easily lead me to burn-out. In recent years, however, I have sought disciplined ways to bring more balance to my world with exercise classes close to my office, listening to interesting podcasts and calling family and friends on the during the commute to the office, keeping Sundays focused on my family and my faith and taking good vacations and long weekends away with my husband.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

When I first started my career, I wish I had known not to be intimidated by executive -level players. I've worked with some really amazing and inspiring people in my career and in my personal life, and I've learned that just about everyone I encounter just wants honesty and respect.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job in the restaurant industry was actually at Willy's. I wore a lot of hats from designing logos to painting the first location with Willy himself.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

Women actually make more than 70 percent of dining decisions in America, so it's a surprise that we haven't been more represented in exec roles. With that in mind, organizations like WFF and internal focus on development by restaurant leaders is likely contributing to greater diversity in total.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

If I had to choose anything, I would say maybe an artist.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I've learned that pushing myself beyond my comfort zone is often when I accomplish the most.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

Oh gracious... there are too many to count! Willy and I often reflect on this one. I think understanding the profound impact culture can play on the success of a brand would have been helpful.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

I was recruited by operators at my local Chick-fil-A to be one of the first unit marketing directors. I was a stay-at-home mom at the time and very active in children's activities in the community with no desire to leave my children to go back to work. They were very flexible; I worked on programs from home, actually job shared with a great friend and took my kiddos to meetings. We were able to rock their sales and soon my job share team had several restaurants and other opportunities from the brand. It was a fantastic experience driving awareness, sales and working with passionate operators.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

I believe women are learning how to go for it. They are goal setting, asking for the opportunities and being heard and seen. I know in the past it was thought you would get asked to step forward and that isn't the case. You cannot expect leaders to know your career goals and ambitions if you do not share.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

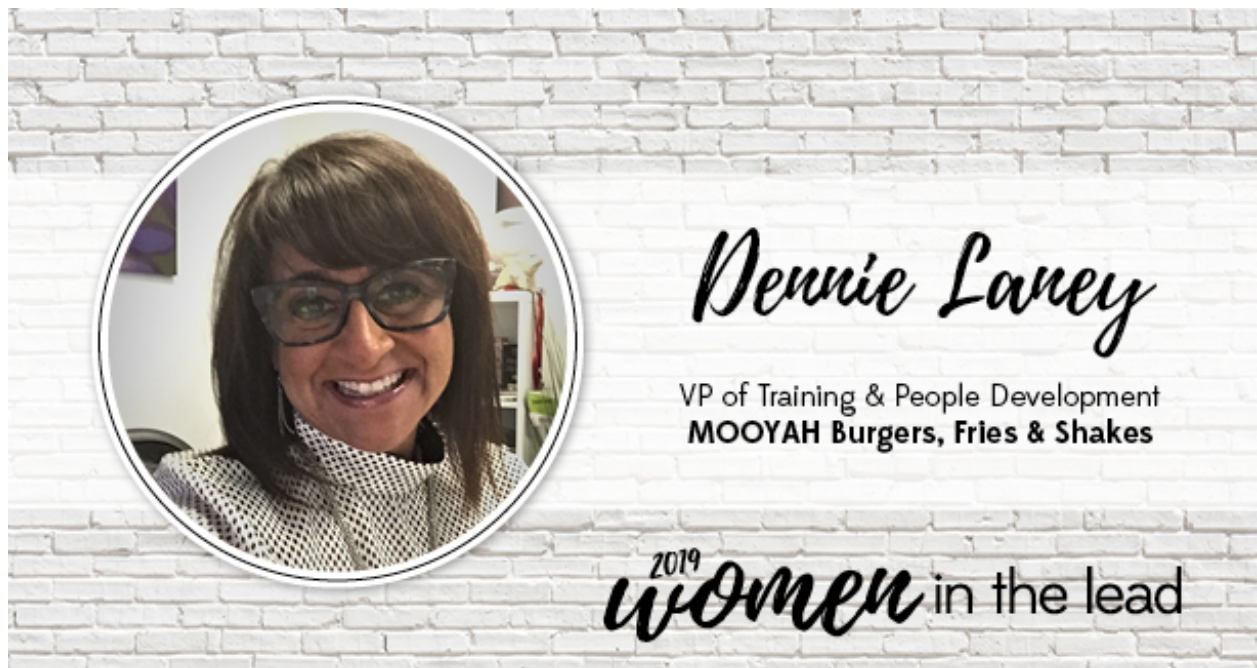
I would definitely be an interior designer and possibly flipping houses! Look out, Joanna Gaines.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I love to drive results through teamwork. It is rewarding to see restaurant traffic, sales and profitability growth, especially when that is done with a team of individuals that are growing, learning and collaborating to make it happen.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

Referring back to why more women are breaking through. I wish I knew in the beginning how to express my career goals and ambitions. In addition, it took me a while to learn I could be very driven about my career and also be a great mom.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

I was a server at Chi Chi's Mexican Cantina.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

Unfortunately, the restaurant industry is notoriously slower in adopting trends that other industries move quickly to. For women in the restaurant industry however, what it comes down to is the work-life balance, at least in the "coming up" years, of building a career within restaurants. I know very few executives in the restaurant industry that did not come through the operations ranks. For most

women to make it past those grueling years of inflexible hours and schedules, balancing family and children can be very challenging. Today, however, it is changing, because of the flexibility being provided to women and their scheduling. I'm afraid that acquiring talent has become so difficult, we have HAD to make accommodations to keep talent, which fortunately has worked in the favor of those (women) who love this business!

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I cannot imagine; I am in the learning function now, as my career has taken a path towards restaurant training and then management and leadership development. However, my heart will always belong to front line leaders of all restaurants, those folks laying it on the line every day, delivering experiences and serving guests who may or may not appreciate them. And I know they do it for the love of serving others. If not in a restaurant, I would focus my efforts and career path in the direction where serving others is at the forefront of all else!

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

That's not an easy question. I suppose have learned over time, that serving and doing for others is not something people choose, it chooses them. As a restaurant leader, I have learned to appreciate the raw inclination in others, to serve. At the leadership level, I have seen leaders that somewhere along the way, have forgotten about what it was like to walk in the shoes of these teams who grind and work each and every day, to deliver an exceptional guest experience — and they do so because they really do care! To anyone at any level in this industry, I would say, if you don't love people — do something else!

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

That it was a career! I did it for the love of it for a very long time. I had no idea the various ways one could support restaurants from outside of the four walls. I thank my early leaders and mentors, who eventually showed me a path, where I could continue to grow and to contribute to this business, and support operators from out here!



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job was a server at Pizza Hut, and then I worked my way through college as a server and trainer for Cracker Barrel.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

I've found that women have an incredible ability to balance a lot of responsibility from many different angles, all at once (and sometimes we make it look easy!). We're not only the "doers" but also the strategic thinkers, which make us incredibly valuable to an organization. Thankfully, the restaurant industry is starting to recognize the value of being able to balance both sides of the business, but we still have a long way to go to achieve a true balance.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

It's hard to say because I've truly found my place in restaurant marketing, especially at Chicken Salad Chick, but if I had to pick, I would probably move into the technology and loyalty space, as that's one of my true passions. If I were picking just for fun, I'd say being a sportscaster for the NFL!

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I've learned how important being a great leader is, not just for myself, but for the team I lead. We all know that people don't leave companies, they leave managers, and I don't ever want to be the reason someone leaves. To me, having someone who is passionate, positive, a good communicator, leads by example, is candid and honest, and who pushes themselves and their team, is essential to being an effective leader worth following, and I work on those skills every single day.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

If I could tell the younger me one thing, it would be to have the patience to find your purpose. My early jobs did not "make sense" as a lead into what I'm doing now, but each one of those experiences shaped me and led me to find my purpose and my place at the Chick. I continue to tell all young interviewees that every project or responsibility that might not "make sense" should be treated as a learning opportunity. Take every single thing that comes your way, dive all in and commit to its success, then learn from it and move forward. You can become a more well-rounded marketer and team player by doing that, and that's truly what has made me who I am today.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

My first job was working at a Burger King restaurant in my hometown of Lancaster, Ohio, when I was in high school. That job taught me so much that I never would have expected — social confidence, composure, leadership. Thinking about it reminds me of how many women (and men) have their very first job in foodservice and how important it is to give them a good experience and the opportunity to learn so careers in our industry are actually desirable.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you more women are finally getting these positions?

I think because more women today are unafraid to stick up for themselves, their ideas and their opportunities, and we also have younger male leaders in the industry who grew up working alongside women and seeing them in leadership roles.

If you weren't in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I would still be in marketing because human behavior and communications are infinitely interesting to me. The fast-paced world of the restaurant business can be somewhat addictive, so I'd probably still be somewhere in the retail world.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

It's probably best summed up by a phrase that's on a painting in my office: "Actually, I Can." Not that I'm (at all) free from self-doubt, but I have been able to accomplish more than my younger self would probably have imagined. It's important for us to impart that confidence and empowerment to our teams as well because what makes the work most fulfilling is helping to develop and grow others.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

That it's not always going to make sense. This applies to everything from selling initiatives into franchise owners to what your career path may look like. It's hard for us rational beings, but accept it and keep moving on.



Rachel Phillips-Luther

Founder and CMO
UP Inspired Kitchen

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women in the lead

What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

I was a regional marketing manager for Tony Roma's. I handled half of the country and worked for the head of Ops. He had me do a 3-week "ops tour" before I could even begin to discuss marketing ideas. It was game-changing and allowed me to really think about our strategy through the lens of operations. We cleaned behind the bar, scrubbed urinals, and I worked the host stand and the fry position. I've continued to be thankful to him for giving me that foundation.

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

More than 70 percent of dining decisions are made by women, so while the industry has been slow to promote women, it can be of exceptional benefit to the brand and business. When I got my start in the business, the majority of ALL roles were occupied by men, but as time has passed, I've seen women embrace roles across the organization, including the C-suite.

If you weren't involved in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I love everything about this business, so it's hard to envision a world without restaurants. That said, I'd likely be an educator or a cultural anthropologist. I do some of both in my role as a brand marketer!

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

Wow! Where do I start? I suppose my biggest learning has been recognizing the profound impact human connection has on our world. The restaurant business is one of the only verticals protected (to some degree) from some of the macro trends that are making human interaction less necessary. The connections, memories and events that transpire in a restaurant are pivotal in people's lives. I love being a part of that and I always encourage leaders to acknowledge the role we can play in people's lives.

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

I wish I had known how much value each of the colleagues I've had would add value in my life. I would have been more intentional about staying in touch.



What was your first job in the restaurant industry?

In high school, I worked at a locally owned cafe as a cashier. I actually still go there to this day!

It's no secret the restaurant industry has been slow to promote females to c-level executive roles, but that seems to be changing. Why do you think more women are finally getting these positions?

I think women are promoting themselves more and taking credit when credit is due, as they should. In the past, that may have seemed far-fetched, but now it's becoming the norm.

If you weren't involved in the restaurant business, what would you be doing?

I'd be working at a non-profit — probably one with dogs.

What have you learned about yourself during your tenure as a restaurant exec?

I've learned I can handle more than I thought I was capable of, and I've learned how to make it fun. It's food and food should be fun!

What is one thing you wish you would have known when you first started your career?

I wish I would have known more about how to get into this industry and started networking earlier.