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Mexico City

Ethics, Business, and Food: Entrepreneurial Recommendations from Mexican Gastronomes

On December 10, 2015, the Eco-Gastronomy Project held a round-table event at JC Redon's Camelia Bistronomía in Mexico City. The intent was to bring together people with an interest in local entrepreneurship and global thinking, and to share ideas about doing gastronomic work in the Mexican context. Six participants gave their unique perspectives: Annabelle Beydoun (shop manager at Camelia), José Carlos Redon (owner of JC Redon, including Camelia, the food truck Bueno Bonito Bistrot, and the farm Teotlacualli), Edgar Delgado Rodríguez (Executive Chef at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City), Alfonso Rocha Robles (Slow Food México), Eduardo Correa Palacios (Slow Food Youth Network México), and me, David Szanto. Following the speakers' presentations, there were a number of questions from the attendees, and a rich conversation ensued. The evening concluded with food and drink, singing and piñata-bashing, and a generous feeling of conviviality, celebration, and future directions.

In the summary below, the speakers have each provided three suggestions for future entrepreneurs, drawn from their own experience with food entrepreneurship and the complicated question of being 'ethical' in business:

Annabelle Beydoun

- Propose options: There is not an absolute truth, not even for sustainability and gastronomes. People may be willing to embrace change by considering several options instead of an order that can be dismissed.
- Added value: How is your solution going to benefit your clients/audience? Showcase the acquisition, not only as the physical product but the improvement in the quality of life of your consumers.
- Hit it where it feels: When promoting actions that require an effort from the population like “buy at your local market”, “cook your own meals”, “use these ingredients instead”, etc... there will be resistance. Create an environment that provokes a positive emotional reaction and you will be met with more ease.

José Carlos Redon

- Be extremely patient, so as to have everything correct and according to the local laws and paperwork required to start a proper establishment. Do your homework first!
- Be very proactive in the follow-up of every single operation that is part of the business, especially at the beginning. Forecast and plan, keeping an open mind so that you can solve whatever possible problems that occur.
- Don't let disappointments get in the way. Stay focused and passionate about the project.

Edgar Delgado Rodríguez

- Be naïve. Food is more complex than we think, let it transcend you. It will surprise you.
- When approaching food, think WHY you are cooking first. It will define HOW you are going to cook.
- Always be aware of what surrounds you.
- Lo posible de lo imposible se mide por la voluntad de un ser humano.
(The possible from the impossible is only measured by the will of a human being.)

Alfonso Rocha Robles

- Purchase Sustainably: As much as possible, buy local, regional, or national foods that are good, clean, and fair.
- Move Towards Zero Waste: Develop strategies and techniques to waste the least amount possible of food, energy, and water.
- Create More Co-producers: Using taste education, transmit the message of co-producing to your customers, in order to develop and strengthen a local Slow Food network.



Eduardo Correa Palacios

- Do not hesitate to get deeply involved in grassroots food culture. Innovation can only be achieved after you have understood where we come from, culturally speaking.
- There is ample ground for healthy competition in the environment of food-related businesses. In fact, collaborations between independent projects is highly recommended for achieving sustainable success.
- Take care of your business partners, especially if they are unique. Never miss a commitment.



David Szanto

- Food and food businesses are made up of ecologies: biogeophysical systems (i.e. “nature”); language and meaning; power and economics; culture and identity; and the ecology of the individual (the “self”). It’s within the interactions among all these ecologies that the opportunities arise for making ethical choices and actions. Try to stay present to ALL of the different ecologies of food, so that “ethics” becomes more broadly understood.
- Actions in the here and now have effects in the then and there. When effects are displaced like that (in time and space), it makes them harder to perceive in our own lived experience. Try to imagine those other places and times that are affected.
- Immerse yourself in the most international and diverse community that you can. When you are exposed to hundreds of other experiences with power and food and business, you start seeing the “then and there” more clearly. Other people’s worldviews help us (as individuals) behave and act more ethically.

