

## BRANDING

### Part 3: Image

There are many things in our lives and careers that we can't control. We can't choose our parents, or where or when we are born. But so many of us underestimate just how lucky we really are. There are a lot of things we *can* control, and your mindset and what you put out into the world are some of them. Your mindset is extremely influential in what happens or does not happen in your career. It's important to remember that no one makes all the "right" decisions all the time, and that sometimes *not* making a decision is also a decision. What truly shapes your brand is the time, energy and thought you put into it. Regardless what type of brand it is, I ask: What do you hope to accomplish by creating your brand? What is the goal, the objective?

One of the most compelling influences in image is what you project into the world. I will discuss a couple key ways to project image that I think run parallel to all of us in the food service/hospitality industry. We will address social media and online content later.

#### Document vs. Create:

If you cook, and you eat, chances are you take pictures of your food. There is nothing wrong with organic "in the moment" photography, but as a professional, I strongly suggest that you collect as much content as you can from all of your experiences. Take it from me, I know how expensive it is to do a video shoot or photo shoot. Lights, camera action, editing, and lots of time getting it all ready—it takes a lot to get it all done. But what many of us neglect to do is "document vs. create." What I mean by this is: If you are already cooking and doing events that fit your style of food, then you should not let those big events, private dinners, and special once-in-a-lifetime events go by undocumented. Hire someone to document them for you, whether it's video or photography. You absolutely want to document as much as you can of everything you are doing—this is what makes you *you*, and it is what will shape your image and your brand. All of this is invaluable in building the repertoire of your brand. It would be like training with a bunch of world-class chefs and never bothering to write any of the recipes down. You only have that one shot, so document everything.

#### Personal Image:

What kind of chef, craftsman, or entrepreneur do you want to be? What persona do you want to have? Having images in mind of what you want to project into the world is crucial. I have seen initiatives over the years that have lost momentum not because they were bad ideas, but because their image was not well-executed. You are not doing yourself any favors by putting up a pixelated, blurred picture of yourself on LinkedIn or on your website or menu. All of this points to the quality of your work. I am not saying that everyone should be wearing clean, crisp, freshly pressed chef jackets. I am just saying that what you wear, how you wear it, how you project it in to the world steers your path, and influences the direction you take, whether you are aware of it or not. Your brand may be more in keeping with a green workshirt with sneakers and a trucker hat. Or maybe you're the tall toque and neckerchief type. Whatever your look and image may be, just know that it matters, and it speaks volumes. "A picture is worth a thousand words," as the saying goes. In our case, it's image that speaks, and it certainly does—loud and clear.