

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Running a Restaurant

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Find investors
and start-up cash

Design a unique menu
and manage a wine list

Choose a great
restaurant location

Michael Garvey

Former General Manager & President,
Grand Central Oyster Bar

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Restaurateur, consultant

Andrew G. Dismore

Restaurant industry veteran, author,
professional chef

Running a Restaurant

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2nd Edition

**by Michael Garvey, Heather Dismore,
and Andrew G. Dismore**

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Running a Restaurant For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Introduction

The restaurant business is an exciting one, full of challenges and opportunities. We're glad you're interested in finding out more about it, and you've definitely come to the right place to get started. Years ago, going out to eat was truly an event — reserved for weekends or special occasions. Today, however, even a Tuesday, just another day, can be an occasion to eat out, especially when busy careers and overloaded family schedules leave little time to cook. Fortunately, consumers have more restaurant choices than ever before. And opportunities in the industry have never been greater. This book can help you minimize the challenges and overcome the obstacles before they overcome you.

We've managed, worked, eaten, mopped floors, tended bars, learned to repair equipment midshift on a Saturday night, hired, fired, trained, and done inventory in some of the best (and worst) restaurants in the world. We've worked in ultrafine dining, fast food, catering, and everything in between. We've worked dining rooms that sat 30 and catered events that fed 50,000 diners in a single day. Sure, each of these situations is somewhat different, but many aspects of running a restaurant transcend restaurant size, location, or dining style and fall under the category of universal restaurant truths. We do our best to bring all that information to you in this book.

Whether you're a seasoned restaurant veteran or just out of cooking school, we believe that if you're reading this book, you have the desire to run a restaurant. After reading it, you should know whether you have a passion for it — or what we sometimes call The Sickness.

About This Book

Success in the restaurant business is the dream of many and the achievement of few. Often, would-be restaurateurs have misconceptions about what running a restaurant is really like. Some folks are quick to see the glitz and glamour without also seeing the anxiety and effort that accompany it. Others have seen the business from the inside and are sure that they can do it better than the people they've worked for, without feeling the true weight and complexity of the tasks and decisions that face The Boss everyday. On the other side of the coin, you find people who could do very well in the restaurant business but stay out because of the horror stories they've heard.

We want you to see the full picture — the good, the bad, and the absurd — so you can make an informed decision about your place in this business.

We wrote this book because no Bureau of Restaurant Operators exists to test your knowledge and skills to determine whether you have what it takes to get into the business. After you've read the pages between these gorgeous yellow and black covers, you'll have a good idea of whether this is the racket for you — and the knowledge to get started on the right foot.

Plenty of books tell you how to open a restaurant, but you don't find many on how to *keep* it open. This book does both. Why? Because you can never stop improving your service, evaluating your product, scoping out the competition, and researching opportunities in the marketplace. Change is the only constant in the restaurant business. To succeed, you must anticipate and act on new trends, new pressures, and whatever else the market throws your way. The spoils go to those who see opportunities before they happen.

Please don't mistake our realism for cynicism. We want you to be in the business. But we're going to make sure that you have the information you need to be a success. We show you many everyday realities that people don't always consider but should. We hope you take the information and use it to be wildly successful. You can do this, but you have to look at this business the right way. If you do, save us a table!

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, we use the following conventions:

- » *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that we define.
- » **Boldface** indicates keywords in bulleted lists and the action parts of numbered steps.
- » Monofont is used for Web addresses.

What You're Not to Read

Sidebars, which appear as text enclosed in shaded gray boxes, consist of information that's interesting but not critical to your understanding of the chapter or section topic. You can skip them if you're pressed for time. You can also bypass bonus material marked with the Technical Stuff icon.

Foolish Assumptions

Just as restaurant owners have to make assumptions about the customers who will be eating there, authors have to make assumptions about their readers. If one or more of the following descriptions hits home, you've come to the right place:

- » You're thinking about opening your own restaurant, and you want practical, how-to advice to accomplish your goals.
- » You've worked in the business, and now you're thinking about getting in on the ownership or management end of things.
- » You've never worked in a restaurant, but you've met with success in other professional endeavors and possess skills that may be applicable to this business.
- » You're fresh out of cooking school and are thinking about putting those skills to work in your own place.
- » You buy every book that sports a yellow and black cover.
- » You currently own or operate a restaurant, and you're seeking advice, tips, and suggestions to keep things running smoothly and successfully.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into five separate parts. Here's what's on the menu.

Part 1: Getting Started

In this part, we give you a crash course in the restaurant business, including tips for getting started, understanding your options, creating your concept, and picking your name. We help you research the marketplace to determine whether your concept has a shot at success, and we provide information on how customers approach buying decisions. We take you through the critical step of writing a business plan. We also help you figure out whether you have what it takes to make it in the business.

Part 2: Putting Your Plan in Motion

In this part, we focus on acting on your idea. We go through the ins and outs of finding the right location or making an existing location work for you. We give you

tips on finding financing for your new business. And we wrap up by dotting some *i*'s and crossing some *t*'s, including help on getting the right permits and licenses, getting up to speed on local laws, and legally protecting yourself the right way.

Part 3: Preparing to Open the Doors

Here, we detail all the tasks you need to do to get up and running. We walk you through hiring and training your staff and developing your menu and beverage program. We show you how to set up your kitchen and dining room for the best flow of food and people. We also give you concrete tips for purchasing and managing your inventory, which can take you a long way toward profitability. And finally, we cover two often-neglected areas of the business: operating your office and promoting your business.

Part 4: Keeping Your Restaurant Running Smoothly

This part is for anyone running a restaurant today or tomorrow or considering doing it in the future. We show you how to maintain and build on your current operation, including tips for managing employees, keeping your diners coming back, and handling customer service situations. We explain how to keep your place spick-and-span and ensure food safety. We show you how to get great information about what your customers want. And we wrap it up with a lesson in watching your numbers, with tips on which reports to run, how to analyze the numbers, and how to make changes to your business when necessary.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

Here, we dispel ten common myths about running a restaurant, and we give you some of our favorite only-in-the-restaurant-business stories.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are the fancy little pictures in the margins of this book. Here's a guide to what they mean:



TIP

The Tip icon marks ideas that can make your job a bit easier. The tips are often hands-on ways to improve your business today.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon points out ideas that sum up and reinforce the concepts we discuss. In fact, if you're in a time crunch and can't read everything, you may want to go straight to this icon.



WARNING

We use the Warning icon to alert you to potential pitfalls and to give you a heads-up on mistakes to avoid. Pay particular attention when you see the lit fuse.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Think of the paragraphs marked with the Technical Stuff icon as bonus material. Usually, the info gives you some noncritical background on the subject. We think the info is interesting, so we include it, but you don't have to read it to get the essential ideas and concepts.



MOCK
CONCEPT

We use the Mock Concept icon to highlight information related to our imaginary restaurant, Urban Forge Pizza Bar, which we create in Chapter 2. We use Urban Forge as an example throughout the book to help you see in concrete, easy-to-understand terms exactly how to create sales forecasts, write marketing copy, and more.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet. To get this Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com and search for "Running a Restaurant, 2nd Edition For Dummies Cheat Sheet" by using the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

We think that you'll find the information in this title valuable enough that you'll want to read it all. Doing so provides you with a strong, general foundation for starting and running a restaurant.

But one of the great things about a *For Dummies* book (among the hundreds that we can count) is that you don't have to read it word for word, front to back, cover to cover. If you're more interested in one particular topic than another, that's fine. Check out the corresponding part, chapter, or section and read up on that issue. You can find out about your topic of choice without first having read the information that precedes it, giving you get-in-and-get-out convenience. Interested in

tips to create or improve your menu? Turn to Chapter 8. Are you currently looking for a location to plant your new shop? Check out Chapter 6. Is sanitation your thing? Chapter 17 has your name written all over it. Need help understanding how to make social media work for your restaurant today? Hop on over to Chapter 15.

You can jump around, start wherever you want, and finish when you feel like it. So tie on your apron and get going.

1

Getting Started

IN THIS PART . . .

You're standing on square one. In the chapters that follow, we introduce you to the restaurant business and help you determine whether you have what it takes to make a go of it in the restaurant world. We help you choose the kind of restaurant that fits your geographic area and your expertise. We help you understand that in order to be successful, you have to create food that people want to buy, again and again. We also help you nail down your concept, come up with a name, and start researching everything from your potential customers to the competition. And we show you how to develop a restaurant-specific business plan.

- » Understanding the basics of the business
- » Deciding whether you have the necessary skills

Chapter **1**

Grasping the Basics of the Restaurant Business

Restaurants are fun. Whether you stop by to celebrate a special occasion, grab a quick bite for lunch, meet friends for a drink, or pick up dinner for the family on the way home from work, the experience is usually enjoyable. (At the very least, it's more enjoyable than not eating or being forced to cook!). Just about everyone associates restaurants with having a good time. So it's natural for people to think, "I enjoy going to restaurants, so I may as well get paid to do what I enjoy — hang out in bars and eat at great restaurants."

And you know what? Living the restaurant life is fun. We've been doing it for many a year, and we love it. But the problem comes when people see only the fun and never the struggle. Viewed from the dining room or barstool (or from the kitchen, stockroom, or anywhere else other than the seat marked "Proprietor"), it's difficult to see the 95 percent of the picture that's pretty tough work. In the restaurant business, you have so much fun that you can hardly stand it. It's kind of like wishing every day was Christmas and actually getting your wish. You get tired of wrapping the presents, preparing the eggnog, and checking that the elves are on time for their shifts, and if you have to look at any more roasted chestnuts, you'll die. The restaurant business quickly becomes more work than fun, so don't be fooled.

In this chapter, we take you on a quick tour of the business. We introduce you to all the upfront work that you must do on paper before you can even think about picking up a pan or laying down a place setting. We move on to the physical preparations that will consume your every waking minute on the way to opening your doors. Then we remind you that when you first open your doors, the work has only begun. Finally, we help you examine your motivations and expectations for pursuing your dream to determine whether both are rooted in reality.

Getting a Feel for the Restaurant World



REMEMBER

The restaurant world is more than glitz and glamour. It's truly a business, and if you don't look at it that way, you won't succeed. Ultimately, being a restaurateur is being a manufacturer. You're producing a product (food) from raw materials (your ingredients) and selling it to a customer (your diner). You're competing with lots of other manufacturers for that same diner. So you'd better do it better than the other guy, or you'll be out of business.

In this section, we discuss planning your restaurant, hiring experts to help you set up shop, and attracting customers.

Laying the foundation

Sometimes the business of *the business* is tough for people to relate to. Your product is packaged in many layers, including your exterior, your lobby, your staff's attire, the music playing, the aromas emanating from the kitchen, the friendliness and knowledge of your staff, your silverware, your china, and your glassware. All these things make up your packaging, affect the costs of doing business, and influence your diners' decision to come in and, ultimately, to come back.

As with any business, the planning stage is crucial, and you have to survive it before you can enjoy any of the fun. Right off the bat, you have to develop your restaurant's theme and concept (see Chapter 2), research the market (Chapter 3), develop a detailed business plan and use it to find and secure financing (Chapters 4 and 5), and find the best location for your new restaurant and get the right licenses and permits (Chapters 6 and 7).

Buy your products at the right price and sell them at the right price. This simple tenet can make or break your business. Check out Chapter 13 for tips on getting the best price and look to Chapter 8 for pricing your food and beverage menus right from the start.

Setting up shop (with a little help)

Depending on how new you are to the restaurant biz, you may need accountants, attorneys, contractors, and a host of other characters, all at the ready and working with you at various stages of the project.



TIP

Hire an accountant early in the process of setting up your business. She can help you get your numbers together for your business plan, which is a must-do if you're trying to get financing for your venture. (Chapters 4 and 5 can give you the details.) After you're up and running, you analyze your monthly financial reports and look for ways to improve the numbers. A good accountant, preferably one with restaurant experience, can help.

When starting any new business, you need to review contracts, file your permits, or maybe incorporate your business. Depending on how you set up your business, you may need to draft a partnership agreement or two. Before you sign franchise agreements or vendor contracts or fire your first employee, make sure that you're working with a good attorney, who can help you with all these tasks and more. Watch for details in Chapter 7.

Most people starting a new restaurant or taking over an existing one change a few things (or a few hundred things) at their new location. Maybe you need to set up a new kitchen from scratch or improve the airflow of the hood over the range. Maybe you want to upgrade the plumbing or install air filtration in your bar. Contractors can save you lots of time and trouble. Don't hesitate to ask them questions and check their references.

Check out Chapters 9 through 11 for the scoop on designing your exterior, dining room, kitchen, and bar — with or without the help of contractors, designers, and architects. Interior designers and architects come in very handy around renovation and revamp time. Sometimes they can give your place a face-lift for much less than you imagine.

Welcoming the world to your restaurant

All the hard work you do to get to the point where you can open the doors means absolutely nothing if no one shows up. Start thinking about how to draw customers way before you open your doors (and every day after that). Develop your marketing plan based on what's special about your restaurant. Maybe it's the food, ambience, price, or value. Study your competition, watch what they're doing well (and not so well), and understand where you have the advantage.

Different groups respond to different messages, so figure out what works for the diners you're going after. Check out Chapter 15 for details on telling the world about your place and getting them to beat a path to your door. After you get the customers in the seats, you have to keep them there. We've heard that you can't use restraining devices in most states and municipalities, so you do have to let diners go and hope they come back. We want you to do more than hope. Chapter 18 gives you concrete tips for building your clientele and ensuring that most of them come back — and bring their friends.



REMEMBER

To be successful in this or in any business, you need to take care of your business today, tomorrow, and years from now. Stay up on trends in your sector and the restaurant business as a whole. Watch for information about shifting dining preferences and behavior in trade magazines, print publications, television news (and the not-so-news magazine shows), the Internet, or anywhere else you get information. And always keep an eye on your competition. Don't copy them, but know what they're up to. See Chapter 3 for information on how to conduct a market analysis, and check out Chapter 19 for ways to maintain what you create, using feedback from financial analysis and operational reports.

Finding Out Whether You Have What It Takes

Culinary prowess, a charming personality, and an ability to smile for the cameras — that's about all you need, right? Wrong. Take a step back. Running a restaurant successfully takes a lot more. Anyone can run a restaurant, but not everyone can run one well. (In fact, we should've titled this book, *Running a Restaurant Really Well For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, but the publisher wouldn't go for it.) In this section, we help you evaluate your motivations and expectations, and we identify the key traits of a successful restaurateur.

Monitoring your motivations

The restaurant business is a tough business, and if you want to succeed, you have to have the inner motivation — the drive — to sustain you through all the downs that accompany the ups. This isn't a venture for the faint of heart. If you want to own a restaurant to have a place to hang out with your friends and get free drinks, we say take the bar bill and avoid the hassles.



TIP

The first thing you need to do, before you invest any additional time or money in this venture (besides purchasing and reading this book, of course), is to examine and understand the factors that motivate you. Be honest with yourself.

There are lots of great reasons to want to run a restaurant. Here are a few of our favorites:

- » You love an ever-changing work environment.
- » You love taking on a challenge.
- » You're passionate about the business.
- » You have a passion for food.
- » You hate having any free time (including the holidays).
- » You're continuing the family tradition.



WARNING

The following list contains a few reasons for running a restaurant that should send up a red flag in your mind:

- » You think it'll be fun.
- » You want to be a celebrity chef.
- » You want a place to hang out.
- » If Emeril can do it, so can you.
- » You're tired of having a "real" job.
- » You've always wanted to run a restaurant after you retire.

If one or more of these red-flag reasons sounds familiar, don't be completely discouraged. Just make sure that motivations such as these aren't your only, or even your primary, reasons for wanting to get into the business. Do some further investigation before making the financial, personal, and professional commitment to the business.

Evaluating your expectations

Running a restaurant, either yours or someone else's, is a huge commitment. It requires long hours, constant vigilance, and the ability to control potentially chaotic situations — on a daily basis.

Think about *Cocktail*, the great (or not-so-great, depending on your point of view) '80s movie in which a salty old bartender marries a rich lady and uses her money to open his own place. Just before he kills himself, he pours out his soul to his younger bartender friend, played by Tom Cruise, about what it's really like to own your own place. He confesses, "The only thing I know about saloons is how to pour whiskey and run my mouth off. I knew nothing about insurance, sales tax, or

building code, or labor costs, or the power company, or purchasing, or linens. Everyone with a hand stuck it in my pocket.”



REMEMBER

Running a restaurant shouldn’t be a leap of faith. You need to go into this venture with your eyes open. Just as you should carefully consider your motivations (see the preceding section), you also need to make sure that your expectations are firmly planted in reality.



TIP

Take out a pen and some paper and divide the paper into two columns. In the first column, list all your expectations for the future business. List everything from the profits you expect to the lifestyle you hope those profits will support to newspaper reviews or the customer views you hope to elicit. This is your chance to put your dreams on paper. In the second column, write down what you expect out of yourself to make this thing happen — your contribution in terms of time and money, sacrifices you’ll have to make, and anything else that you can think of.

Then determine whether the expectations on your lists reflect the reality of the situation. Reading this book is a great place to start — our goal is to present a balanced look at the joys and pains of running a restaurant. (If you want an instant reality check, skip over to Chapter 20, where we confront ten common myths.) But don’t stop there. As we state in Chapter 2, you have to start researching every aspect of the business on Day 1, and you don’t get to stop until you close your doors for the very last time. So you may as well start now. Minimize the mystery by getting out in the restaurant world — talk to owners, managers, waiters, and suppliers about their experiences and what you can expect.

Tracking key traits of successful restaurateurs

Based on our experience in the restaurant business, successful restaurateurs exhibit a few common traits. We list them here. Don’t worry if you possess more of some traits than others. Just being aware of them is a great step toward making them all part of your world and succeeding in the business.

Business sense



REMEMBER

Business sense is probably the single most important trait for restaurateurs. For all that the restaurant business is, it’s still basically a business, subject to the same pressures as any other. Keep that thought in mind going into your arrangement. Skills that you’ve learned, developed, and honed in the real world can apply in this business, like buying skillfully, managing tactfully, and negotiating shrewdly. But many different facets of this business are tough to pick up, so you need good business sense.

Tolerance

The ability to keep your cool under pressure, thrive in chaos, and handle multiple points of view and personalities serves you well in the business. Whether you're dealing with customers, employees, purveyors, changing trends, or a fickle clientele, you have to develop a thick skin. The inherent stress of the restaurant makes for short fuses. Your job is to dampen those tempers, smooth the rocky waters, and calm the storm.

Flexibility

The restaurant environment changes from minute to minute, so you have to be able to adjust and think on your feet. Seek a good balance of process- and product-motivated people. *Process-motivated* people micromanage what's going on in their organization. *Product-minded* people focus on the end result. Sometimes you'll wear both hats.

Creativity

Infuse creativity into every facet of your business, from how you approach your customers and your food to how you promote your business. That creativity affects how your business performs.

Positive energy

Whenever you're in the restaurant, you have to be "on" — all the time. Restaurants that have a positive vibe are the ones that survive. Positive energy is *key*, as intangible as it is, and your restaurant can't have positive energy if you don't.

Ability to hold (or hold off) liquor

Coveted by many, achieved by few, the ability to handle one's liquor has been the downfall (physically, financially, and spiritually) of many a restaurateur. Per capita, no industry drinks more than the restaurant business. For some people, managing a restaurant is like getting the keys to the grown-up candy store, and the temptation is too much to resist. As a restaurateur, you often drink as part of your job. No matter what the circumstances, you still have to count the money at the end of the night, and you have to be ready to go first thing in the morning.

Leadership skills

Restaurateur /res-tuh-ruh-TUR/: n. doctor, babysitter, marriage counselor, bail bondsman, parent, mediator, conscience, seer, sage. *See Patton, George; Ghandi; et al.*

Being a leader in this industry means being able to balance an entire range of different management approaches, knowing when to lead by example, and knowing when to give the troops their marching orders. Most importantly, a successful restaurant leader is able to find her own leadership style and deal with employees fairly, consistently, and respectfully.

Schmoozability



REMEMBER

Pucker up. People like to feel important. They want to be part of the inner circle of the restaurant, no matter how large that circle may be. It's cool to say, "I know the manager" or "The chef's a friend of mine." Nothing gets return business like calling a diner by name. That's why you put up with the pictures of grandkids, complaints about big projects at work, and not-so-interesting travel tales. Always make the customer feel welcome, at home, and at ease. Turning a good mood into a bad one is incredibly easy. Turning a bad mood into a good mood is exponentially more difficult.

Passion



REMEMBER

We call it The Sickness. To succeed, you have to have passion. Running a restaurant is a business that eventually chooses you; you ultimately can't choose it. If you don't have passion for the business, you can't sustain, maintain, and overcome the obstacles that crop up.

You have to connect *everything* to your passion. You have to get the wait staff wired with it, because they're selling your vision to the customers. You have to get the prep guys pumped, because they're cranking on a tough schedule, without the natural excitement of a restaurant full of people. You have to get the dishwashers psyched about cleaning the dishes, because the dishes frame the experience for the customer. Diners should experience a buildup of expectations for their experience from the first time they come into contact with anyone from the restaurant (whether on the phone, in person, or online). Imagine doing all that without a passion for your restaurant, and you see why passion is mandatory.

Presence

Being in the restaurant day in and day out has no substitute. Absentee landlords need not apply. Just stopping in to say hello or giving off an aura that you know what's up ultimately won't allow you to run the restaurant. If you're not there, those who are there in your stead will be the de facto rulers. If you're not physically present in the building most of the time, the schmoozing, the energy, the passion, and so on can't get to your staff and ultimately to your diners. You can't positively impact your restaurant if you're not there.

- » Finding the right starting point
- » Picking the right restaurant for you
- » Selecting your concept and restaurant name

Chapter 2

Deciding What Kind of Restaurant to Run

If you're like most folks who are thinking about getting into the restaurant business, you have an idea of what kind of restaurant you want to run and are looking for a way to get started. But before you run out and print your menus, think about your options. Better yet, take the time to research your options to set up the best plan for you and your restaurant.

Think about your reasons for wanting to get into this business. Money? Prestige? Are you buying a franchise as an investment or creating your dream restaurant just as you visualized it? The more you can understand your motivations for getting into the business, the more you can define the type of restaurant you should open and what rewards, hazards, and trade-offs come with each individual choice.

In this chapter, we show you different ways you can get your business started, and we give you some pros and cons for each. We walk you through the different styles of services you can offer. We introduce a mock concept restaurant that we use as an example throughout the book, and we help you finalize the theme and concept for your new restaurant. Your concept ultimately shapes all your research, planning, and design, so spend some time developing it.

Figuring Out Where to Start

For most restaurants, you have several possible starting points, including going with a franchise, taking over an existing restaurant, or starting from scratch. We give you the pros and cons of each in the following sections.

Buying into a franchise

In the restaurant business, buying a franchise is buying a license to sell a restaurant's food and use its brand, logos, and name. Wendy's, McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC are examples of restaurants often sold as franchises. The company who sells its franchises is called a *franchisor*.



Not all chains are franchises, but all franchises are chains. A *chain* of restaurants simply means that there's more than one just like it. Many chains, such as In-n-Out Burger, Starbucks, and Hard Rock Cafe, are owned by a parent company, not by independent *franchisees*, people or companies who buy into a franchise.

Buying into the franchise is a relatively safe investment in the risky restaurant business, but it's not without some limitations. Here are the pros of buying into a franchise:

- » Franchises typically have a proven track record and have worked out the bugs.
- » Franchises have a consistent product, have a set menu, and usually have product developers on staff to handle menu updates.
- » Franchises have built-in brand recognition and established customer loyalty.
- » Franchises help you with marketing, realistic sales projections, market research, and market analysis.
- » You get a jump-start on all human resources (HR) and administrative issues because franchises come equipped with all their own forms, policies, and scheduling philosophies.

As good as all that sounds, most of the cons of buying into a franchise are closely associated with the pros:

- » You have to pay franchisors potentially hefty initial franchise fees and significant royalty fees monthly, usually a percentage of sales.

- » You have to follow their rules, meet their numbers, and serve their menu. If you're the creative type, the franchise mold may be the wrong size or shape for you. Love it or hate it, when people see the golden arches, they know what to expect, and they don't want you messing with it.
- » Because franchises are fairly lucrative, franchisors are very selective about whom they franchise to. Often you have to have a significant amount of money to invest and agree to open multiple units.

Obviously, this info is only a snapshot look at the world of franchising. If you decide that a franchise is the path you'd like to take, we suggest you check out *Franchising For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Dave Thomas and Michael Seid (John Wiley & Sons, Inc).

Taking over an existing restaurant

You may have an opportunity to take over an existing operation, either one you've been a part of or one that you're completely new to. Maybe your boss wants out and you're going to buy into it. Maybe you're walking by and see a for-sale sign in the window of your favorite diner.



REMEMBER

The primary positive and negative aspects of taking over an existing restaurant are relatively straightforward, but it all boils down to discerning the owner's motivation for selling. If the restaurant is relatively successful and the owner is retiring or moving or has health concerns, taking over may be a head start. It presents you with an instant client base that you can build upon. Often, though, restaurants are sold for reasons that paint a much bleaker picture of future success. The owner may be trying to pass along a loser or is facing a significant investment to remodel the restaurant to bring it up to code or compliance with local regulations.

Your job is to figure out which of these scenarios is more likely. Before signing on the dotted line, work your way through the following list:

- » **Open up the books and get the full financial picture.** Chapters 4 and 19 cover which numbers to look at and what information to gather.
- » **Find out the history of the space and the current concept.** Just knowing it was a restaurant isn't enough. If it was a shop before that, why did it stop operating? How does the neighborhood work? If the first floor fills up with water every three weeks, you want to know that before you sign the lease. Check out Chapter 6 for details on choosing the best location.



WARNING

A common reason people sell a successful business is that the landlord intends to raise the rent. If you're buying the business, you may also be assuming the lease or be required to agree to this increase. Talk with the landlord and the business owner about future plans for the space.

- » **Decide whether you're going to take over the business or just the location and equipment.** If you're buying the business, you probably want to keep the name the same. If you do change the name, you'll probably be hurting yourself, at least in the short term.



TIP

If you determine that the current business is working well, you may want to keep quiet about the fact that new ownership is in place. Your regulars will know, but for customers who come in only occasionally, why bother notifying them about the change? The idea of new ownership or management can affect people's perception of the place as they fall into the "back in the good old days" mentality. Suddenly, their old favorites don't taste the same, or the wait times are too long.

- » **Work with a reputable contractor and inspector to thoroughly go through the restaurant from top to bottom before you finalize your deal.** You may incur lots of unforeseen costs when you take over an established restaurant, including repairs to older equipment and facilities. Check out Chapter 9 for tips on working with a contractor.

Partnering up with your current employer

If you're considering partnering up with your current boss, our advice is to look this gift horse in the mouth. When you buy into a restaurant, you buy into its profits and losses, its assets and liabilities.

If the restaurant is a profitable business that's well run, consider why someone is giving you a piece of it. Why is someone letting you buy into it? A number of legitimate and potentially profitable motivations exist:

- » Reward for your hard work
- » Part of an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) that allows managers and employees to buy into the business over time through the fruits of their labor
- » Selling off part of the business to generate capital required for expansion or remodeling
- » An owner who wants to retire

However, other, less-positive motivations may be behind the offer:

- » The operation is leaking money like a sieve. If someone wants you to put money in right away, be leery.
- » The owner's attention is being diverted to another business, so by giving you a stake in this business, he's giving you an incentive not to rob him blind while he's distracted.



WARNING

Anytime you consider entering into a partnership, you want to see the books before you hand over any money. Make sure that you get involved with a financially sound business that offers the potential for success.



TIP

When getting involved in any partnership, get definite answers about how much and what kind of say you're going to have in day-to-day operations and long-term planning. Clearly define on paper who gets what, including compensation, profit sharing, the best parking space, and Christmas Eve off. If something's important to you, write it down and make sure everyone signs it.

Starting from scratch

We can quickly sum up the pros and cons for this one: Starting from scratch is exciting and scary. This restaurant is your baby from the ground up. You may be taking over an existing space that's been abandoned for years, or you may decide to convert a shop or a house into a restaurant. (Take a look at Chapter 6 before you sign on the dotted line for any space.) Either way, you'll have limitations for what your space can do, but you can get very creative with the obstacles in terms of layout and flow. It's like putting together a puzzle — rebuilding the pieces to fit your concept.



REMEMBER

Starting from scratch can involve a lot of work. Very few spaces are ready and waiting for you exactly as you want them. And implementing your idea isn't as easy as saying, "I want to make this bar 40 feet long and 4 feet high, mahogany with a marble top." You actually have to figure out how to build it and work out all the details. Work with a contractor to implement your vision. You'll face the fun of electricity, plumbing, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, placement of everything from ranges and coolers to the wait-staff stations . . . the list goes on. Check out Chapters 10 and 11 for info on laying out the front and back of the house. And get an inspector to come in and evaluate the space, just like when buying a home.



TIP

When you're starting from scratch, plan for the future. During the rebuilding after a fire, coauthor Mike left extra plumbing hookups under the floor in the middle of the lounge so he could add a sushi bar later if he wanted to. Always add more power outlets than you think you'll need, even in the office. Extra cable and wires for electricity are handy in case you have to move something around later.

Choosing the Right Type of Restaurant

Forty years ago, going out to dinner was an event. Now it's more routine, and the number and variety of restaurants that you can find illustrate the change in America's eating habits.



REMEMBER

As a general rule, the atmosphere defines the type of restaurant more than the food does, but food and atmosphere usually go hand in hand. For example, out-of-this-world carnitas slathered in chili verde with fresh lime and cilantro could be served from a cart on the side of the road, at a casual Mexican eatery, or in a world-class fine dining establishment like Rick Bayless's Topolobampo in Chicago. Although some menu items may be similar, the atmosphere of each venue is very different.

In this section, we discuss fine dining, casual eateries, carry-out and delivery, fast food, bars, and catering services.



TIP

There's no magic formula or dollar amount that you need to start a restaurant. The cost varies based on the concept, size of your space, size of your menu, location of your space, number of employees you need to hire, cost of insurance in your area, and so on. Do your homework to figure out how much money you need to spend and why. Chapters 5 and 6 can help you with the details.



REMEMBER

Just because you can open a restaurant doesn't mean you should. Many factors play into the decision of which type of restaurant to open, including competitive threats, the attractiveness of your concept to the local market, and the positioning of your concept. Understand these factors and remove any known barriers before you commit to a specific type of restaurant opportunity. We discuss these factors later in "Creating Your Concept."

Dining in style

Fine dining, dining with the highest quality food, service, and surroundings, usually includes the highest prices as well. If you choose to run a fine dining restaurant, your restaurant needs to cater to the guest's every need.

Soaking up the atmosphere

When your diners walk in your door, they should know they're in a fine dining establishment. If you choose to open a fine dining restaurant, include these atmospheric factors in your plans: