

SPRING 2023

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EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

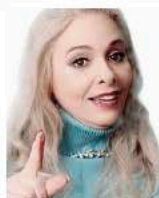
Spring 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** (who'll be speaking at CS+TSE) discusses the importance of developing your people



Catering consultant **John Lombardo** sheds some light on the meat-less market



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** shares her employee motivation strategies for managers ahead of her appearance at CS+TSE



Kitchen guru **Robin Selden** challenges her chefs to be the best



Chef Jay Varga wants to see you (and educate you) at Art of Catering Food

What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We'd love to hear from you. Write us at editor@catersource.com.

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by Robin Selden



Truffled Forestier with black garlic aioli.
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Everything Tuna Reuben. Photo courtesy
Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Veggie Filo Candies with tamarind yuzu
chutney. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden
Catering & Events

Are You Up For the Challenge?

The only way to grow is to challenge yourself, right? That goes for your culinary team as well. If you want your culinary team to grow and to prosper you need to challenge them. They need to feel uncomfortable, possibly insecure, yet supported, and pushed to get out of their daily routine, to believe in themselves, and to trust that no matter the outcome, the fact that they tried is the only way to better themselves.

We've found that the successful recipe to challenge our team has been to encourage their creativity, build their confidence, and let them compete in our culinary challenges.

Twice, and sometimes, three times a month for the first quarter of the year

we post our challenges, and the results are astounding! Some of the best menu items that we've added to our repertoire come from these challenges. The growth that we see in our team and the confidence boosts are insane. Here's how they work.



Robin Selden is the Managing Partner & Executive Chef of Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering, where she oversees the culinary and marketing operations for her family's multimillion-dollar company. In October 2019, Robin was honored to be named to the BizBash1000 celebrating the top 1,000 event professionals in the USA in 2019 and to the BizBash 500 celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the United States. Selden is in the President's Council as a past President of the International

Caterers Association and won their Chef of the Year award. She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival.

Determine what your menu needs are

We often engage our sales team to understand what they would love to see. Since they have the pulse on what sells, they are the best barometer to know what items need to be reinvented.

Once you've determined your needs, pop them into a spreadsheet because you must be extremely organized. Suggestions can be as specific as: chicken or beef, hors d'oeuvres, embellished salads, short rib entrée presentation, plated or passed desserts—the possibilities are endless. I will use our most recent chef's challenge as an example. We did an hors d'oeuvres challenge and asked for vegan and gluten free beef, chicken, and lamb hors d'oeuvres.

The challenge

For the challenges, which always occur on Mondays, we post a sign in the kitchen that describes in detail what is expected. The actual presentations happen a week or so later, giving our team enough time for R&D.

“They are pushing each other to grow and to be better with each item that they make.”

For this example, the challenge read: *“Create one new hors d’oeuvres preparation from each of your two selected categories.”*

Each team member that participates (even our pastry team joins in), randomly selects two of the categories that we have put into a chef’s hat, and pass around. Last week we had 15 participants, which as you’d imagine was great, as we had 30 hors d’oeuvres.

“Hors d’oeuvres must be artfully presented, one bite, garnished and served as they would be at an event. Please prepare 24 of each so that we have enough for the judges to taste as well as a full presentation as it would be at a party on one of our hors d’oeuvre trays.”

“Must have: Name of the item with a description as well as a typed recipe without your name as the

judging will be blind. Feel free to ask the front office team to help type them for you.

“Must be ready to serve at 1:00 p.m. on XXXXX.”

“FYI...any special ingredients needed may be ordered. Please have order lists in by XXXXX at 1:00 p.m.”

“Think outside of the box... we are looking for creativity, taste and style. Something that we do not currently offer, and that we can add to the menus now.”

Once each chef has selected their hors d’oeuvres categories, it’s exciting to see the creativity start to flow; cookbooks and food magazines are covering their workstations as they dive in for inspiration. You’ll find them spending their breaks on the kitchen computers researching, others will be perusing the walk-ins and dry storage waiting for that item that will jump out and inspire them.

What I love most is that while they all know that it’s a competition, they come together and help to support each other’s ideas, to make recommendations and champion each other. Sometimes they also deliver the not-so-great news which is that they think they may need to move in a different direction and try something else. The truly beautiful dynamic here is that they care about each other and the overall success of each person over winning the challenge. Don’t get me wrong, they all have egos and want to win, but what’s great is they want to win against something that is equally as great or better than what they are doing. Do you see what’s happening here? They are pushing each other to grow and to be better with each item that they make. As a business owner,

seeing this camaraderie, internal growth, and bonding is all you could ever want for your team.

Challenge prep

In the meantime, while the chefs are creating their dishes, we do the following to get organized:

- Judges are selected at random for each of the challenges from our operations and front office sales and marketing team; they always include the principals plus three additional team members. This is a coveted role to be in and once again helps to bring our team together.
- Next, we select, also at random, the team member who will be making the presentations of the items to the judges. All are presented anonymously as to keep the playing field even.
- Our conference room is set up with six judges’ stations to include their ballot sheets, a pen, waters, a trash can, disposable plates, and a photo light box to photograph all the items.
- We purchase the winning gift cards, which are distributed at the deliberations that happen the following morning. For our challenges, we have a first-place winner that wins a \$100 Visa Gift Card, second place gets \$50 Visa card, third place gets a \$25 Visa card, and fourth place gets a \$10 coffee card.
- Each individual hors d’oeuvres is judged on the following categories: presentation, taste, creativity, and recipe. Each category is given a score from one to 10 (10 being the highest score). The scores are added together to give a final score for that item.



Freeze Dried Buffalo Cauliflower Popcorn.
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



BBQ Barbacoa Taco Bites. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Challenge day

Challenge day is here, so let the games begin! The energy in the kitchen is so exciting! They are hyping each other up with each tray that leaves the kitchen. The judges assemble at their table and the presenter begins presenting the hors d'oeuvres one at a time, giving the judges ample time to photograph each item, taste, judge, and make notes.

The chefs anxiously await the presenters' return to the kitchen, trying to see if there is any indication of how they did. The presenter repeats the process until all the items have been presented.


Meanwhile, after the last item is served, the judges sit to review and tally their scores and to determine the top four scores. At this time, they decide who will give the feedback for each of the items at the judges' presentation the following day.

Each hors d'oeuvre is thoughtfully criticized and we encourage the judges to speak the truth but in a kind and gentle manner, particularly if they are delivering bad news on a not-so-great item. We do this, not to discourage anyone's future participation in our challenges, but because they need to hear the truth. Bringing a positive spin on something negative is always a better route to take and it makes it much easier to deliver when it's being done blindly.

Additionally, we share ideas for potential revisions that would make an item one that we would sell and ask those team members to go back to the R&D drawing board and to present the revised items within one week of the challenge. Our goal here is to have great new hors d'oeuvres to add to our menus, so if we think that tweaking one to get it there would be worthy of their time and efforts, we suggest it. Our other goal is to encourage our team to continue pushing themselves and not to look at this as a loss, but rather as a win personally and professionally.

And the winners are...

Time to announce the winners! Each of the winners is announced beginning with the fourth highest scored item. At this time, the chefs who made the hors d'oeuvres come forward and their identity is finally revealed. As a leader and a mentor to our team, this moment is thrilling to me as invariably the winners are not who we imagined. The boost of adrenaline and pure joy in their faces is amazing! What's extraordinary is that two of the winners were team members that were the most hesitant to participate in the challenge and literally complained throughout the entire process!

As I was walking back to the office, one of them pulled me aside to say 'thank you'. She said she never imagined that she could ever win a challenge like this and that she was grateful that we encouraged her and didn't give up on her. The best part is that she didn't give up on herself and she accepted the challenge and went for it ... clearly, she was up for the challenge and didn't even realize it. Just yesterday she came to my office to inquire about when the next challenge will be. THAT is why we do these. She is now excited to contribute and to be creative and will hold her head up high when she sees her winning hors d'oeuvres featured at an event or showcased on our social media. Challenge accepted! 

See Robin Selden LIVE!

You can see [Robin Selden](#) live and in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, March 27-30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

- She will deliver the welcoming address and emcee the first day of [Art of Catering Food](#) on Sunday, March 26th at 9:00 a.m.
- She will co-present [The Power of Leadership & Team Development](#) on Tuesday, March 28th at 2:00 p.m.
- She will emcee this year's [DICED Competition](#) on Wednesday, March 29th at 11:00 a.m.

Visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent> for all the details

STEAL THIS

Fresh ideas to use or adapt at your next event.

Serving Vessels that Surprise

Catering and novelty have always gone hand-in-hand—novel menu ideas, novel food displays, and one of the easiest (and maybe one of the most memorable or impactful) are novel serving vessels. The miniature martini glasses and charcuterie cones have had their moment, but caterers today are looking for even more whimsical and outside-the-box thinking for showstopping bites and cocktails. Get inspired with these serving vessels that surprise for your next event. —Amber Kispert



Hart to Hart (gin, pineapple rum, raspberry, Falernum, sparkling rosé, and bitters) served in a glass heart | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



Homestyle meatloaf, mashed potatoes, peas, and carrots served in Hungry Man inspired foil containers | Marcia Selden Catering & Events (Stamford, CT)
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Cup O' Noodles | 24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals

Mini Skillet Paella | 24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Jodi Sasaki



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Goat's M
24 Carro
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**Sourdough English
muffin with crushed
avocado and rainbow
micro flower, served
on miniature chairs |
24 Carrots Catering &
Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy
Katie Pritchard**



**Pot of Gold Mac n Cheese served in
miniature cauldrons | 24 Carrots
Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals**



**Milk Panna Cotta served in a wine glass |
24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Brett Hickman**



**Savory egg custard with truffle
caviar served in a broken
eggshell | 24 Carrots Catering
& Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals**



(Above) Burrata served on a plate featuring a fork slot | Pinch Food Design (New York, NY)
Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



(Above) Magic Mushroom (Plantation dark, yuzu, Peychaud's aperitivo, myrtle berry, lion's mane, shiitake, and citrus) served in a mushroom-shaped glass | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



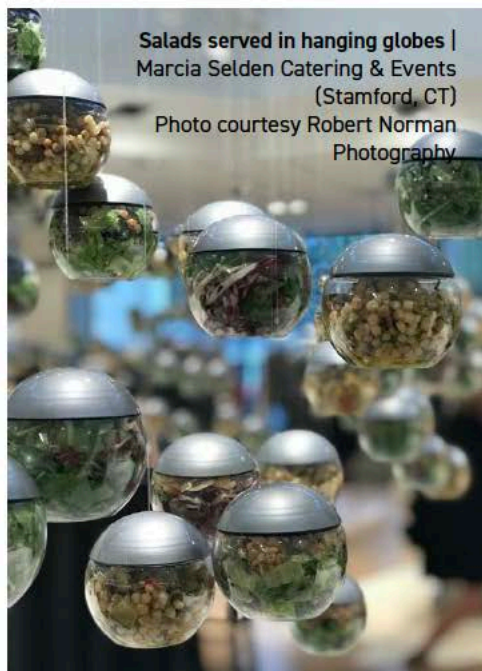
Cocktails served in a lightbulb | Blue Elephant Catering & Events (Saco, ME)
Photo courtesy Blue Elephant Catering & Events



Cocktails served in *Star Wars* themed glasses | Canon (Seattle)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



Miniature pan | Feastivities Events (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Feastivities Events



Salads served in hanging globes | Marcia Selden Catering & Events (Stamford, CT)
Photo courtesy Robert Norman Photography



(Left) The Canon (re-barreled cask strength Maker's Mark, floral liqueur, bitter-sweet amaro, and blueberry-thyme shrub) served in a miniature canon | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau

Miniature fry baskets | Feastivities Events (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Leslie Gilbert



(Above) Soup and breadsticks served in miniature Campbell's soup cans | Constellation Culinary Group (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Constellation Culinary Group