

Be a Disruptor

An Interview with Stratis Morfogen, Restaurateur, Brooklyn Dumpling Shop and Brooklyn Chop House

EDITORS' NOTE *Stratis Morfogen has been an innovator in New York City's hospitality scene for decades. He brought New York's famed Fulton Fish Market to the internet in 1997 with the creation of FultonStreet.com, and was the restaurateur behind many well-known New York establishments including Club Rouge, Gotham City Diner, Hilltop Diner, The Grand, Philippe Chow, and Jue Lan Club, among others. He is the author of *Be a Disruptor and Damn Good Dumplings*.*



Stratis Morfogen

Where did your interest in the hospitality industry and restaurant business develop?

I'm a third-generation restaurateur. I've been an entrepreneur since the age of 18 and always disrupt everything I've ever done.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My journey starts with high risk – with an acceptance that failure is ok. With failure, it is a learning vehicle to do better and advance your career goals. I am focused on disrupting everything I do. I like to identify a traditional business – tear it down, reimagine it, rebuild it, and build it better.

Will you highlight your current restaurants?

Brooklyn Dumpling Shop is keeping me quite busy with 20 shops opening this year and another 175 in development across North America. I am humbled to be on the 40/40 List, which is the top 40 U.S. franchises voted by readers of *Franchise Times* magazine, plus many more accolades applauding the first contactless casual experience.

Brooklyn Chop House is the first to bring Beijing Chinese cuisine to an American Steakhouse. We call it dim sum and chops and it has disrupted the tired steakhouse/chophouse 160-year-old menu.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for new ventures?

I used to tell family and friends to stay away from the restaurant industry because it's a tough business – if you do not know the business, you will fail. Now, with the leverage of technology, bringing back the Automat, and advancing the tech into a smartphone-controlled Automat which is capable of accepting third-party delivery

platforms, I tell them all to jump into the hospitality industry. We've created a restaurant where we can serve over 300 guests with three employees and one manager to oversee 3-5 shops. This will not only save a business and save an entrepreneur, but this will also save an industry if we can reverse the 7 out of 10 restaurants that fail in the first 30 months, and instead have 7 out of 10 succeed by bringing the payroll from an average of 30 percent down to 20 percent. That's what we've done with technology.

What interested you in writing the book, *Be a Disruptor*, and what are the key messages you wanted to convey in the book?

I never look at a business and say, "Ok, let's open it." I look at a business and tear it down and disrupt the status quo and recreate

it in the way I want to do it and envision the guest experience.

For many years I've been asked about writing my story from very close people who knew my story, so I finally did it. I stood up to the mob and their stranglehold on the hospitality business. They terrorized restaurants and nightclubs along the Upper East Side of Manhattan and I took a stand. This story has never been told, and I decided it was time to tell it.

What are the qualities you look for when hiring talent?

A big smile, great energy, and charm. Experience is not enough. I can't teach you how to smile, but I can teach the rest.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

Listen – Digest – Engage – Disrupt – Create, and effectively execute with a team that's smarter than me. ●



Stratis Morfogen in front of the smartphone-controlled Automat concept he developed