

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

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An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



Avi Shemtov

Owner-Chef, Chubby Chickpea, Canton, MA
By Foodservice East

Avi Shemtov sees his foodservice career as owner of restaurants, catering services and most recently, The Chubby Chickpea food truck, as the result of the influence of his father, a restaurateur. He grew up feeling that if his father were to get into a fight with a bear, he'd pray for the bear, he recalls, adding: "I've tried to model my life after that."

FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: Was your father's restaurant career an inspiration to you?

SHEMTOV: No question! My father's whole life has been an inspiration. Some days I wish I had gone to culinary school. I have a bachelor's degree in ethical, social and political philosophy. But I think in reality, it is a passion I've always had for food and family that led me to this life.

FSE: How did you begin your foodservice career?

SHEMTOV: I just put up a sign and winged it from there.

FSE: What led you to move away from your start in restaurants and catering to a food truck?

SHEMTOV: Clover inspired me. At the time a good truck was all about doing what you wanted and staying true to the passion behind your food. I wanted in on that.

FSE: What is the hardest part of what you do?

SHEMTOV: Haha. What isn't? Managing people, that's easily the most difficult part of my job.

FSE: What led to making the cart Glatt Kosher?

SHEMTOV: I was never really comfortable not being able to serve food to the community that I grew up in.

FSE: What are your personal food favorites?

SHEMTOV: Ironically, I love Porchetta. The Porchetta at Pennypackers blows my mind. In our place my favorite is a falafel & fried eggplant laffa with schug (hot sauce) and banana peppers.

FSE: How do you come up with new, creative ideas?

SHEMTOV: It's a gift and a curse, but I encourage everyone in my kitchen to go with what feels good and figure it out from there. Food is about happiness- never make something that doesn't make you happy.

FSE: What is the secret of your success?

SHEMTOV: Not paying attention to it. Success is a bi-product of hard work and focus. If it comes, great. Don't make it your goal though!

FSE: What are the biggest challenges this year?

SHEMTOV: Consistency is always my biggest challenge. Passion drives me, but it also derails me. Dave Harnik (dining car) taught me that. I'm learning, slowly.

FSE: How are you addressing those challenges?

SHEMTOV: Systems in a kitchen are vital, but I never want to lose the heart that is in our food. Our cuisine is peasant food born on the dirt floors of my grandmother's homes in Turkey and Israel. Strong systems make it feasible to serve that on volume, but I need every member of my team to serve every customer the best dish they've ever made.

FSE: Do you cook at home and if so, what's in your 'fridge?

SHEMTOV: Oh geez- all I do is cook. If I could cook all day every day I would. We eat a lot of fish at my house, and balance it out with red meat and lots of pork, haha. My fridge always has a few unique greens, some sausages or chicken thighs and ground turkey. After that, it's whatever's on sale.