



## A Mentor's Light to Hope and Hospitality

**M**entors enrich and celebrate our talents, inspiring us to believe — such as my pianist grandmother, who turned me on to Rachmaninoff, Ravel, and Beethoven. She left an indelible mark that sparked my music career, recording and playing with Woodstock icon Richie Havens. When that career stalled, waiting tables seemed a deep drop from riding in limos and playing at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

### Awaken a spirit

Then came Michael O'Grady of Paulo's of Georgetown in Washington D.C., who turned the mundane job of waiting into an art form. Each night was a "live show daily" to be delivered with mastery, purpose, and joy. His insights awakened a spirit of passion and discovery. He also recognized my enthusiasm for selling and put me to work as a trainer. When I took a new kind of show on the road,

Michael cheered me on. I went from delivering seminars for \$75 at the MacArthur Café to delivering keynotes, developing sales, coaching, and creating front-office programs for Marriott, Disney, and Four Seasons.

### Respect and encourage

Michael devoted his time and attention to everyone, from dishwashers to managers. Consider Juan, a dishwasher from civil war-ravaged El Salvador. Living in a rough part of D.C. with three other families, he had to take two buses to work. Paulo's was an emotional safety net, where Juan not only got a regular paycheck and a meal but also was respected as an important part of the team. Even more important was when Michael asked Juan how to reduce breakage and improve efficiency. Michael's support sparked him to move up to line cook.

### Provide opportunity

Our Thai busboys also came to

America for a better life. Everyone had a minimum of two jobs and took a handful of days off annually. Michael told them that every night is a theater production with positions to take and lines to deliver. Following his lead, they moved through the dining room with grace and harmony, clearing and resetting tables in 15 seconds flat. Kit, our head busser, attended college while working at Paulo's and took insights from Michael to open his own restaurant, Urban Thai.

### Build leadership

"Michael's lessons furthered me," says Tom Girard, former dining room manager. "I'll never forget the night Michael pulled me aside and said, 'I need you to move faster — a lot faster. Everything starts with the manager and filters down. So, you must lead with a sense of excitement and urgency. My two words for you: double espresso!' Michael told the story of how people love to stand at the edge of a construction site and

watch people work. 'When guests see you moving with energy and passion, they give you the benefit of the doubt,' was a lesson I carried with me throughout my restaurant career and beyond," continues Tom.

### Be a hope giver

Michael gave us faith that there could be more than just the everyday grind. Not everyone bought into Michael's maniacal pursuit of perfection. Still, most cherished his brash and playful ways because we felt his love for us. He was an ironic mix of critical perfectionist and empathic supporter, who led us to his promised land.

Michael was also a guide of a different kind. An addict himself, he shepherded many to the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous of Georgetown's Westside Club and helped others get into treatment centers and on to a life of recovery. Sadly, in October of 2003, he took his own life — but not without leaving behind many lessons that go well beyond the hospitality industry. In the end, I'm at my best when I follow in Michael's footsteps as a hope giver — not just to those I teach, but to my friends; family, Emily, Nathan, Connor, and my wife Judith; and all who reach out for inspiration, mastery, and love.

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**BOB BROWN**, president of Bob Brown Service Solutions, [www.bobbrowns.com](http://www.bobbrowns.com), was the #1 speaker at the 2017 National Restaurant Show. He has worked with hospitality icons such as Disney, Hilton, Morton's of Chicago, Nordstrom, Olive Garden, and Ritz Carlton and works internationally with the prestigious seven-star Burj Al Arab in Dubai. He has appeared on the Food Network and is author of *The Little Brown Book of Restaurant Success*, selling over 100,000 copies worldwide. Contact Bob for keynotes, breakouts, and workshops at 571-246-2944 ©Bob Brown Service Solutions 2016.