

## FAST TIMES

THESE ENTREPRENEURS LEARNED  
UNEXPECTED LESSONS FROM  
THEIR FORMER FAST-FOOD JOBS.

BY NICHOLE L. TORRES

THINK ALL YOU LEARNED during those days working at your local burger joint was how to salt fries? Although these entrepreneurs may not have realized it at the time, their first jobs in the quick-service industry really did end up teaching them a skill or two about running a business.

■ “When I was 13, I worked at a bagel store in New Jersey. The one thing that resonates the most in my life today [as an entrepreneur] is how to manage employees. It’s important to always make your employees feel they are part of a team and their contributions directly affect the success of the business. Also, the customer is always right!”—*David Wilner, 28, founder of Rhino Imaging LLC, a document imaging company in New York City*

■ “I [worked in] a bakery/cafe in Bay-side, New York. I learned to treat

customers well, look people in the eye, smile when you [deal with complaints], and always respond in a positive way. I apply that now to my [business]. My clients can always get in touch with me. I can be on a beach somewhere, but I’ll always call them back. People really appreciate that level of service.”—*Debra J. Caruso, 44, founder of DJC Communications, a PR firm in New York City*

■ “I worked for a [well-known franchise]. What I took away from my fast-food experience was that you’ve got to be flexible with processes—for example, [that company] actually had a process for how you should hold a broom and sweep. There was only one way—if you didn’t do it that way, it was wrong. Having defined processes in place should ensure a smoother operating environment and reduce chaos... but be flexible, and know that they’re going to change over time.”—*Darren Smith, 38, co-founder with David Sroka, 41, of Point of Reference Inc., a B2B provider of sales reference management programs in Denver*