

## **Student FAQs for Chef Michelle Dudash, RD**

Updated March 2011

### **1. Who had the most significant impact on your choosing this area of practice?**

My grandmother. When I was looking to choose my classes before freshman year, she simply asked, "Why don't you take a nutrition class? That's all you talk about!" It was love and first sight.

### **2. What do you find personally rewarding in your field?**

Helping people eat better, feel better, look better. Helping businesses become more successful.

### **3. What are the things can be frustrating or disappointing?**

When a person or company throws money at a problem, but doesn't implement the changes I recommend.

### **4. How stressful is this occupation?**

If you manage your time well, the amount of stress is manageable. Things seem more stressful when I'm not getting enough sleep, exercising, or eating right. The bigger the project, the stakes are higher and I want to perform better.

### **5. How do you personally balance home life and work responsibilities?**

Prioritize. You can't do everything, so some things you outsource and some things you just have to say "no" to. Think of what will matter in the long run and ultimately help you your goals.

### **6. What do you think the future looks like for nutrition entrepreneurs?**

The sky is the limit. Get specialized.

### **7. What motivates you to stay in practice?**

I love what I do, I think big, and I think outside of the box. I want to provide a great life for my daughter and it's fun to see what I can accomplish when I put my mind to it. Of course the money is nice too!

### **8. What are the most important skills someone should have to find success as an entrepreneur?**

Be motivated, only settle for the best, put your best foot forward every time, be organized, have high energy, time management, remember that *everything* is business and business is everywhere. But business is largely based on relationships, so it's not about you, it's about them. Try not to take things personally.

**9. What types of part-time, full-time or summer jobs do you recommend to prepare me for this career path.**

Work in foodservice. Any experience helps. Work at the best restaurant that will accept you. Or do a stage (French word), which is working for free in a kitchen for a limited amount of time. Cook as much as you can. Read cookbooks. Get involved with the ADA Food and Culinary DPG.

**10. What kind of professional work experience is needed before becoming self-employed?**

Make sure you have a plan. Find a mentor. Get an accountant. Join the ADA Nutrition Entrepreneurs DPG. Network. Volunteer with your local dietetic district or affiliate. Get experience in the area you want to go into.

**11. What academic courses were most beneficial in your niche?**

Most of culinary school. Counseling, all of the nutrition and food science classes. Management and human resources, and psychology. I wish I paid more attention in accounting. I just didn't enjoy it at the time.

**12. Who helped you to get into private practice or business through networking or otherwise?**

My husband is an excellent business person and is my advisor. I've had great mentors like Stephanie Green, Elisa Zied, Sharon Salomon, Lisa Ekus. Other people along the way have offered encouraging words, such as Carolyn O'Neil, and Anthonia Allegra. When you're in the presence of luminaries, be a sponge. Avoid toxic, negative people when possible.

**13. How important is it to know someone in the field?**

Huge. I can't stress networking and involvement enough.

**14. What magazines, journals, and web sites are important to utilize in your area of practice?**

Local newspaper, watch local national news, look at mainstream cooking magazines to see what's hot, read newsletters in your DPGs – FCP and NE. Eatright.org. PubMed. Web MD. CSPIs Nutrition Action Newsletter. Tuft's Newsletter.

**15. If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path? Would you change anything?**

Yes, that is unless I became an entertainer or dancer or singer☺ I may have taken more business in school.

**16. What are the busy times of the year for your practice/business?**

Jan, June, September and May, but most months are busy actually. I vacation more in the summer, so July and August can be lighter, but crazier because I need to pack in the same amount of work in fewer days.

**17. Where do you see the opportunities for self-employment in the area of nutrition and dietetics?**

Everywhere... make sure someone has a need to buy it and be specialized.

**18. What are your job responsibilities that take place on a daily basis?**

Daily: Respond to new business prospect inquiries via phone and email. Social media.

Weekly: Media interviews – write pitches, segment sheets, write grocery lists, test recipes, practice, perform interviews. Conduct nutrition analyses and collect pertinent info. Write, practice and perform speeches. Review and write menus. Update website.

**19. What do you like/dislike about your job?**

**Likes:** I really do love all other aspects of my job, especially those where I am “performing”, like speaking and media interviews.

**Dislikes:** Sometimes I have to work on the weekends for media interviews, conferences, etc. I value my weekend time with my family and time to decompress from hectic week, so I prefer not to work on the weekends.

I used to get stuck in Quickbooks and get frustrated. Otherwise doing the books isn't too bad. → Now I have a bookkeeper who takes care of most of this for me!

I used to have to wash the dishes and clean up after getting home from a long day of doing a cooking demo or media interview. → Now I have an assistant who takes care of most of this for me!

**20. What direction do you think this field will go to in the future?**

It looks like dietitians may need to have an advanced degree (Masters), like some of the other medical professions. Specialization will be more important, as RDs are needed everywhere there is food involved.

**21. What kind of salary range can one expect in this position?**

Once your business is established and has a full slate of work, \$50,000 - 70,000 and up per year.

**22. What would be considered qualified for an entry level position in your job? (ie: education and experience requirements, beginning salary)**

Having your RD, culinary degree. Some professional cooking experience. Some media experience. Some speaking experience.

As an employee at a public relations agency \$35,000-\$45,000

**23. How has your culinary training helped your career as an RD?**

It puts me ahead of the competition since I have both a culinary and nutrition background. I can develop recipes, do cooking demos, and develop menus and recipes.

**24. Do you consider you have an advantage over other RDs?**

Absolutely.

**25. What are the biggest challenges in your profession?**

Other RDs not charging enough for their services is a frustrating challenge we face. This can bring all of our values down. When starting out, make sure you understand the cost of doing business and how much you need to charge to make a decent living. Getting paid as an independent contractor is much different than getting paid as an employee, since the contractor has to pay many expenses, such as for a website, media materials, insurance, conference fees, etc. Think about the people you may pay for services like your hairstylist, plumber, massage therapist, and ask yourself how your value may compare to theirs.

In PR, many projects are last minute and results are wanted immediately, so you must work quickly! This can be exciting though too.

**26. In your experience, how has the contact with the media helped you succeed?**

I can place my own TV segments. I'm confident in front of the camera and can speak to large audiences. This has helped me gain work as a media spokesperson, writer, and speaker.

**27. What would be the best piece of advice you would give a student who wants to follow your steps?**

Attend media trainings whenever it's available to you. Read a lot, write a lot, speak a lot. You may need to give away some things for free or low cost when first starting out in speaking and writing to get experience, but once you have some experience, charge what you are worth. Network and volunteer with organizations.