

EDITORIAL

Food and science: Lessons learned from a great chef

The late great Chef Floyd Cardoz once told me “Running a research laboratory is like running a kitchen at a restaurant – one part creativity, one part ingenuity, one part training, one part financial planner and a lot of hard work and sleepless nights”. He also told me that the most important thing about running a restaurant is to always pay it forward –mentoring the next generation of young scientists or young chefs. Being a physician scientist who loves food and wine I never quite thought about how many similarities there are between the culinary world and biomedical research. Floyd taught me that every day and those lessons learned will never be forgotten and have because part of what I teach all of the students in my lab. Because of Floyd's vision we started the Young Scientist Foundation (www.ysf.org) that to date has supported over 70 high school and undergraduate students to engage in biomedical research in translational research laboratories, several who have gone on to MD PHD programs at Harvard, Yale, and the University of Michigan. Unfortunately, last year we lost Chef Cardoz after a courageous and prolonged battle with COVID-19. His teachings and conversations resonate more now than ever – he taught us about the importance of mentorship, of taking time out of our increasingly chaotic and busy days even if only for 15 min to pay it forward. Today and every day since his passing I try to walk into my lab and have a sometimes random and other times directed conversation with an undergraduate or graduate student in the lab about their career, about food, about pretty much anything they want to talk about. Floyd taught me that mentorship does not always have to be about work or about the tasks of today. Let the conversation take a natural course – listen to what people want to talk about and not what is on your agenda. The next lesson I learned from Floyd was the importance of hiring people based upon their ability to work together, to synergize and unite towards a common goal and purpose. He taught me that pedigree is not everything and that intelligence can be over-rated. It is a combination he always felt of our emotional quotient, our intellectual quotient, our passion for our purpose and our ability to communicate that to our team that makes for a great new hire. Looking back at the people I hired in my lab who were successful those words could not have been more true and the advice could not have been more timely as I think for all of us growing our independent labs, hiring the “right” people is one of the most challenging and daunting decisions we have to make. I had the chance to cook with Floyd several times both at our house, at his house with his amazing and talented wife Barkha Cardoz and in his restaurant Tabla in New York City and what I soon realized is that every dish he cooked started with a hypothesis, a concept based upon

previous experiences (data), intuition (education), and our technical ability to execute on the requisite steps to make the vision a reality (training). It was Floyd's encyclopedic knowledge of past bites of food, flavor combinations that worked, pairings that are interesting together but never pretentious or over-engineered. I remember when Floyd was over at our house we brought out the sous-vide machine, four sets of tweezers and the micro-greens from the refrigerator. Floyd patiently but sternly said to me just like in science where great work is not a product of technologies and kits nor his cooking. He told me that a great dish comes from our experiences, from our training and from our passion for the craft. Harness those experiences and channel them into a dish, into an experiment that you have the skill to execute, work with your team, bounce ideas off of people you respect and like in lab meeting present your data and actively solicit criticism. He attended a number of lab meetings always happy to see the spirited back and forth between all members of our research team, no hierarch just like in the kitchen, taste your food over and over again he would say and then have your colleagues to do the same until you get it right. The lessons learned from this great man, a visionary in the field of modern Indian cooking who brought his skill, his soul and his desire to make this world a better place on his terms is something I will never forget. I can name many his dishes that I loved – the upma with a wild mushroom fricassee will always come to mind – but like my father, Dr. Mohandas Narla, a brilliant scientist reminded me, we do not always remember the papers that our colleagues publish in Nature, Science or Cell but we never forget the indelible mark that they make through their actions, their commitment to their craft and their desire to always pay it forward to the next generation. Floyd's legacy will never die and will never be forgotten because he helped so many of us realize our dreams and mentored and advised us throughout that journey. I have had many great scientific mentors throughout my career, Drs. Scott Friedman, David Ginsburg, and Paul Klotman to name just a few and I can say that Chef Floyd Cardoz was just as important a mentor to me in my life. So the next time you have a great meal with a loved one, with a friend, with a colleague just remember that cooking and science are similar in more ways than one can imagine. Floyd I miss you so much and please know that my life, my career and my family have been and continue to be enriched by your lessons and the humanity and humility that you showed to all people, from all walk of lives, no matter where they came from.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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