

Senior Culinary Nutritionist at Rouge Tomato and SPE Certified



1. Please describe why you became a dietitian.

When I started college—like most college students—I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do upon graduating. One of my advisors told me to pursue a career centered on something that

I loved, something I was good at and something that there was a need for in society. That simple advice ultimately led to pursuit of a career around food and nutrition. As someone who loved to cook and keep up with the latest restaurant openings and accomplished chefs, but also someone who valued health, my specific focus as a dietitian has been the culinary application of nutrition science. My goal is to integrate thoughtfully prepared delicious food as part of a healthy lifestyle without sacrificing taste and the pleasure of eating.

2. Please tell us about your career and the road you have taken as a dietitian.

To get the proper foundation in nutrition, after receiving my Masters in Clinical Nutrition, I began working as a registered dietitian in the clinical world at a hospital in an outpatient setting. After several years, I chose to refocus and return to my true passion which was food and cooking and enrolled in culinary school. This led to an opportunity at the Michelin-starred health-focused restaurant Rouge Tomato in NYC where I became their in-house culinary nutritionist. That eventually led to my current position as Senior Culinary Nutritionist at Rouge Tomato's sister company, SPE Certified, a culinary nutrition consultancy and certification company. In this role, I work with chefs and food service operators to promote nutritious and sustainable menus. Projects that I work on may include nutrition analysis, recipe development, healthy menu consulting, staff trainings on culinary nutrition, and facilitation of SPE's third party nutrition and sustainability evaluation. I also work with our team to develop and engage in continuing education opportunities and industry events. Outside of my work at SPE Certified, when time permits, I enjoy teaching recreational healthy cooking classes and counseling private clients.

3. How have business skills shaped your career?

While I did not receive any formal business training in school, I have learned a lot through on-the-job training. In my current position, I play an active role in developing pitches and proposals for prospective clients. This involves

understanding the clients' needs, creating a plan for how we (the culinary nutrition team at SPE Certified) can meet their needs and then determining pricing based on anticipated resources needed to execute the project. Once a project begins, I am actively involved with client and account management. While not necessarily typical of an RD position, the skills needed for account management include organization, clear communication, listening to an individual's or company's needs and developing a rapport with clients. Many of these skills are ones that are very familiar to a RD from being trained as a counselor and educator. I was able to indirectly channel that knowledge base into my current role.

4. Did you study business at all in school or are your skills self-taught?

No, I do not have any formal training in business from school. I learned a lot from exposure and training through my current employer as well as pursuing information on my own.

5. What business skills do you wish you had the opportunity to learn more about in school?

I wish there was more education around how to develop and write a proper business plan as well as information on how to best determine the fair market value for the various nutrition services that can be provided by RDs. Because there are so many different opportunities for RDs outside of a traditional healthcare setting, I feel there are not enough resources to help a RD assess the value of his/her services in these less traditional business models.

6. As a professional in dietetics, restaurant management and culinary arts, what would you tell students or young dietitians who have aspirations using their skills in the restaurant industry and in culinary arts?

Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty! Take advantage of any opportunity you can get in the industry even if it isn't seemingly the most glamorous position or perfect job. Hands-on experience is indispensable - whether it is an internship, volunteer opportunity or actual job. The exposure to different aspects of the food service industry will give you the confidence and knowledge base to carve out your niche as an expert. Lastly, don't underestimate the benefit of networking with other dietitians and culinary professionals since both the nutrition and culinary worlds are smaller than you think!

7. Any final thoughts you would like to share?

What I love most about the field of nutrition is that you can make it what you want it to be. Think about your passion and pursue a way to integrate it into your career. There are endless opportunities - sometimes it just takes a little creativity.