



John D. Marzilli

*Chef/Proprietor
Salty's Pub & Bistro*



Success Magazine: What do you think is the true meaning of success?

John Marzilli: Very simply, when you're happy. I mean really happy. When you can look yourself in the mirror and honestly say "I'm doing the best that I can for everyone that I'm in contact with." When you wake up in the morning and you can't wait to conquer the world. Money has no bearing on success. I'd rather be poor and happy than rich and miserable.

SM: When did you first become interested in the culinary arts?

JM: Back when the Rolling Stones and Beatles first came onto the American scene, when JFK was president, back in Pawtucket, Rhode Island at Marzilli's Italian Kitchen. It was a full service restaurant, sort of like a diner, and my mom would drive me there after school. I worked in the pizza room, standing on milk crates so I could see in the oven. I'll bet I was no more than 5 or 6 years old.

SM: Were you naturally gifted in this area, or did you learn to be a great chef because you loved it?

JM: I think it all depends on how you define greatness. We're all naturally gifted in anything we set our minds on. When you're influenced by a parent like I was for so long, you eventually acquire the "taste" for success. Many chefs that have worked with me will tell you that I'm not a chef that follows recipes very well. It all comes from your heart; you have to feel your creations. Sometimes they're not so good, but mostly you stumble upon greatness. That's how you learn. I've always liked learning that way—it's much more exciting.

SM: Did you go to culinary school?

JM: Yes. I graduated in 1978 from the best culinary school in the world—Johnson & Wales University. As a matter of fact, Emeril Lagasse was in my class. He would fetch me things when I needed them. ONLY KIDDING Emeril! I actually didn't find that out until 10 years later, while looking through my year book. He actually grew up about 15 minutes away from my hometown. When I watch him or some other chef from my time, like Anthony Bourdain, I can tell we're from the same mold. It's pretty cool. Hey Emeril and Anthony, I'll kick your butts any time, anywhere.

SM: What was your first job in a restaurant?

JM: Working with my dad, Chef John A. Marzilli. What a cool guy. Always smiling, and boy could he talk. He would talk to customers for hours. I guess that's where I got it from. My first job in a fine dining establishment was back in 1975 at Capriccio's Restaurant in Providence, Rhode Island. That's when I learned that the first day you start a position you should immediately start casing out your next position, so when it's ready for you, you're ready for it. What a great

experience! I still remember every minute of it. Nino the chef called me "La Machine" because I never stopped.

SM: You were the long time Executive Chef at the Marriott in Colonie. How did this experience prepare you for success with Salty's Pub & Bistro?

JM: Any chef who has worked in a corporate environment knows that you live and die by the daily and end-of-month P&L (Profit & Loss) statement. One day you're a superstar and the next day you're looking for a new job. Reflecting back on it all, I wouldn't have it any other way. The Marriott taught me a lot about being successful in business.

Another valuable thing I learned was personality profiling: I had to take this class where I learned to distinguish the different personalities that people have. When I was first tested by my peers I was labeled a "driving driver" which meant that I would "shoot first and ask questions later." It taught me how to deal with associates and guests, to understand what makes people tick, to work on their weaknesses and capitalize on their strengths. I think it's a good way to train people.

“...there is something about Salty's that is real, honest, and comforting.”

I'll never forget a food and beverage manager I worked with named Nick Pijerov – what a character! He taught me the true importance of enthusiasm. This guy reeked of enthusiasm and confidence. I believe you need this quality to be a successful leader. People won't follow you if you don't display this. Believe me, without my staff's support I'm nothing. But the most important thing Nick taught me was to be on the floor meeting, greeting, and listening to your guests and truly making each and every one of them feel like they're the only person in your restaurant. Here at Salty's, I make sure that every chance I get I'm on the floor checking things out and talking with my staff and guests. I think people appreciate that someone who really cares is watching out for them.

SM: What prompted your decision to buy Salty's?

JM: Every time I went to a restaurant I would say "I can do this." One day, a friend of mine who sold great vinegar (inside joke) told me about Salty's. I called up the owner, Ray, and we met that day. Sixty days later I was the proud owner of a restaurant.

SM: What were your goals for the restaurant at that time?

JM: My goals are the same today as they were when I first took over. Concentrate on quality food and service. What are people looking for when they go out to eat? A good meal in a nice atmosphere with pleasant service. I think if you can achieve this, you are on the right track. I don't spend money on the things that aren't really important, like expensive china or flowers. I think that is why people come here, because there is something about Salty's that is real, honest, and comforting.

SM: At the time you bought Salty's it was on the verge of closing. How were you able to turn this around?

JM: As I call it, "Dead Restaurant Walking." Man, I remember the first months, walking the floor and asking myself "what did you get yourself into?"

Back in the early days we were doing in a week what we now do on a good day. How did we survive? I guess when you're at the bottom the only way you can go is up. Work harder than your associate and they will work hard for you.

SM: To what do you attribute your success in this venture?

JM: Keep it simple! Give them great food at a great price and plenty of it, and they will come!

SM: What was the biggest challenge that you faced in your initial start up?

JM: Learning how to run my own restaurant. My biggest challenge was figuring out how and when to make changes without turning off the few patrons that kept the restaurant afloat. The menu that I took over was not what I wanted to serve. But for the first 6 months, I gritted my teeth and slowly made upgrades to the menu one day at a time. I needed to earn the confidence of my guests before I blasted them with my menu. Let's face it, I didn't have two pennies to rub together then, and the last thing I wanted to do was alienate those precious customers that I did have.

SM: How have your goals for the restaurant changed over the last two years?

JM: It's amazing. Every month has been better than the last. This past May was Salty's best month ever....WOW. I know eventually there will be a limit to our growth, but we still have plenty of opportunities. If I don't keep trying to increase associate and guest satisfaction, shame on me.

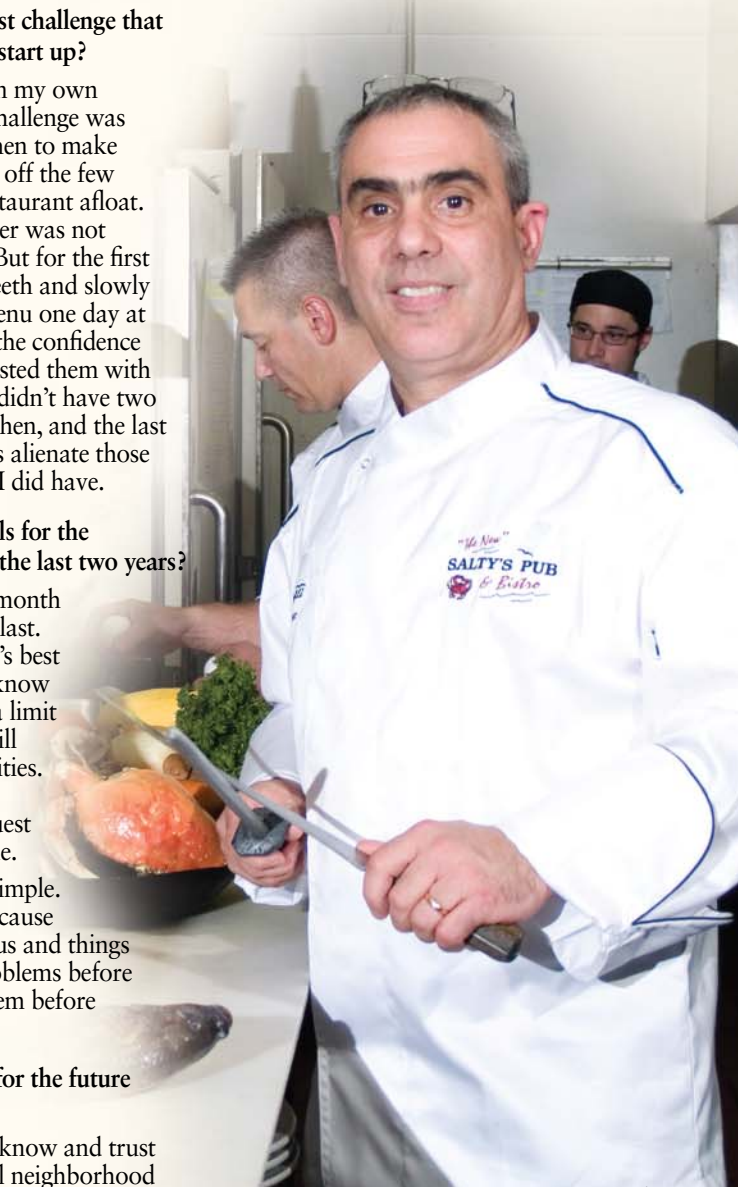
My future goals are simple. Don't get complacent because that's when you lose focus and things start to slip. Find the problems before they find you, and fix them before they happen.

SM: What do you hope for the future of Salty's Pub & Bistro?

JM: I want everyone to know and trust Salty's to be their "casual neighborhood

seafood eatery." We have customers that come here 5 and 10 times a week because they like a place where friends are everywhere and food is plentiful. I would love to see Salty's all over the world, because I think the concept is very simple and universal. WHY NOT? If Ronald McDonald can do it....so can I.

SM: You believe in contributing to your community any way that you can. Why is this so important to you?



Continued...

continued

JM: I'm a very selfish person. I do it for me, because it makes me feel good. "What goes around comes around."

SM: You have hosted the Spirit of Thanksgiving Dinner that is sponsored by the Twin Bridges Rotary Club. What is this event, and how did you become involved in it?

JM: When I was a kid, my dad would invite co-workers to our Thanksgiving dinner every year, and I thought that was pretty cool. Before I bought Salty's, I always felt guilty about cooking and wasting so much food around the holidays. Don't get me wrong - I'm no Mother Theresa, but I think we all think of the lonely or less fortunate during a holiday. The Twin Bridges Rotary meets at Salty's every Thursday for lunch, so one day I told them what I wanted to do, and the rest is history. My Thanksgivings are great now because a bunch of people volunteer to put out a fantastic meal for anyone who wants to come. We don't care if you have a million dollars in the bank, if you have nowhere to go, you are welcome.

SM: What are some other local organizations that you have contributed to?

JM: Just recently I saw a commercial for St. Jude's Children Cancer Center. WOW... Did that touch a nerve. This month I'm doing a cooking class and a large part of the proceeds are going to St. Jude. Another one is the American Cancer Society. Every day people come into Salty's and ask for things that are very special to them. How can I say no? It's good for the community and for business. People don't forget.

SM: What do you enjoy most about being a Chef /Owner?

JM: I love to be in control. I love interacting with my associates. The guests are great. I love writing menus... I love it all. I can't get enough of that adrenaline high you get cranking out 350 covers on a Friday night, and then going out into the dining room and being told that you're

doing a great job. I love to teach people what it really takes to survive in this business. Since I can remember, I've known deep down what it takes, but I never put it to the test until I purchased Salty's. I think that's the best part. My beliefs about how to make it in the restaurant business have proven true. It's a good feeling to see it all come together and watching our team grow. When I look back at where we were, I am amazed at how far we've come. There is no place I'd rather be.

SM: What is unique about Salty's?

JM: You can just tell when you walk into a restaurant if all of the associates are comfortable working there. You can sense that they know what they're doing, they know the menu, and they know how to take care of any situation. I learned long ago to empower my staff to do the right thing and all will be right. I tell them all the time, to service or cook for our guests like they're your family, and I'll worry about the bottom line. My staff knows what our goals are—to exceed our guest's expectation when and where ever we can. As it says on the menu, "If there is a dish or preparation from the past, present, or future that you desire just ask, we'll simply say: YES WE CAN." We don't say no. If you come into Salty's at 9:00pm and want bacon and eggs we'll say absolutely! If we have it, we'll make it.

SM: Who is your greatest role model?

JM: I'll go in order: my dad for infecting me with chef's blood, my mom for showing me how to make pasta, Chef Nino for opening my eyes to fine dining, Chef Frank for showing me how to be a professional, Chef Walter Zuromski for giving me endless opportunities, Nick for driving into my head the word "enthusiasm", Don Urkonis for showing me a P&L statement every day, and then there's all the "gagootzes"

(an Italian name for zucchini heads) whom I've had the privilege to work for. I can't choose one person.

SM: What is your greatest accomplishment to date?

JM: My two daughters Erin & Leah. They're turning out to be real special people. Maybe it's the awards that I've received over the years, or the 4 diamond AAA Mobil Travel Guide awards that we received at Ashley's at the Marriott 13 years in a row. No, I got it... it's my 1959 190sl Mercedes Benz that ONLY took me 30 years to restore! Or could it be The "NEW" Salty's Pub & Bistro? What's next?

SM: The restaurant business can be very taxing. How do you deal with your stress? In what ways do you strive for balance in your life?

JM: I play racquetball 4 times a week from 6:00-8:30am. At work, well I guess I really like being here. I tell my guests all the time: "It's like having a dinner party for two hundred people every night and they PAY YOU" what's better than that? I know a thousand people that I've worked with will say otherwise, but I don't take things too seriously. Being an Executive Chef for hotels for over twenty years has taught me to not sweat the small stuff.

SM: If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?

JM: I just asked my associates to help me with this last question and they came up with: determined, driven, Ass&^%\$, crazy, and conceited (my 4th grade teacher called me that one - she was HOT).

“ I've known deep down what it takes, but I never put it to the test until I purchased Salty's. ”

