



Said Business College

Paul cooks up a success

ROD MACRAE met chef Paul Bellchambers to hear how his hobby became a profitable business

Paul Bellchambers is living the dream when it comes to running his business. He has turned a passion for food into a full-time job. Every year hundreds of people in Oxfordshire, just like Paul, give up their first career to make a go of creating a business from something which had been a hobby or interest.

Paul's working life changed radically ten years ago when he swapped a job in IT and changed industries completely to set up his own catering company, The Late Chef. It was no overnight rush into enterprise though. He had planned his move carefully, retraining at night school to qualify as a professional caterer. "I have no regrets", he told me. "I've enjoyed

every minute of it."

He admits following a dream can look like a gamble when you first start out, but the rewards come from working in something you really care about. "Every day you think 'if I wasn't doing this, what would the alternative be?'"

Based in Moulsoford, he now provides food and drink for events including weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, funerals, and private dining evenings. His corporate clients range from the Oxford University Boat Club, British Rowing Association to Taylor Wimpey and the Said Business School.

Paul has worked hard at The Late Chef to make sure customers feel they have had a great food experience. "Your best calling card is happy and well-fed people who have enjoyed your food" he said.

Having made a success of turning his passion into a profitable business, he has good advice for anyone making a business out of their hobby. So what advice does he have?

"I'd say don't spend so much time on what you enjoy and neglect the fact that you have a business. If you do that, you may not be in business for very long."

"Knowing where you have weaknesses can make the difference between folding or thriving, simply because you can find ways of addressing them. You might discover you need someone to work part-time to do things you aren't

Paul's top tips for making a business from a hobby

1. Don't spend all your time on what you love. Remember you need to make money.
2. Be honest with yourself about the things you find difficult and work hard on limiting their impact on your weaknesses.
3. Find help to acquire the extra skills you need to run your enterprise well.
4. Don't rush in. If you need to re-train, do that before you leave the day job.
5. Don't be afraid to ask other people in business for advice. Picking other people's brains can save a lot of pain learning from your own mistakes.

very good at or find workshops to help you get to grips with areas of business which aren't your strength."

With a busy order book, Paul Bellchambers says it is sometimes tough setting aside the time you need to work 'on' the business not 'in' it. That is certainly true when it comes to training. "For any small business the challenge is finding where there is help. You kind of get a little bit sucked into day to day jobs and forget that there are other things out there that can help us."

"How to find new customers is probably the hardest thing anyone has to learn in business. The first workshop I attended was on finding new customers and it was run by the Elevate programme at OxLEP" he explained.

Since then I have been brushing up on my marketing skills at two digital marketing workshops. All these events have helped me to

refresh my ideas and sort out some aspects of my approach to promoting the business."

"I suspect that people starting out ignore gaps in their skills and use a lack of time as an excuse for failing to acquire new skills. Paul sought out courses taking up no more than half a day. "The Elevate workshops have been really good for me because they had a mix of being talked to, being challenged and working in groups. I found that I suddenly got a flash of inspiration or somebody else would ask me 'why have you not tried this?'. It was all very supportive."

Paul Bellchambers says he now recognises you can never stop learning and is still applying things he's learned at workshops to The Late Chef business.

The Late Chef: thelatechef.com
For more help as a start-up or growing businesses, visit oxfordshirelep.com/business



Peter Bellchambers