

Ted Epstein Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Emily Yuris

Interviewee: Ted Epstein

Location of Interviewee: Newburyport, Massachusetts

Location of Interviewer: unknown

Date: 12/14/2020

Abstract: I interviewed my boss, Ted, who is the owner of Loretta in Newburyport. I asked him a few questions of what he had to change since the pandemic began. Before I started asking him questions, I made sure he was okay with me recording and then posting this on the Covid-19 archive. Ted was given guidelines from the CDC and the government for what he had to change, and he was the one who had to implement them, which was challenging. This will benefit people looking back at 2020 because they will hear how we had to change from the perspective of a small business owner, which doesn't happen very often. Small businesses are often silenced by larger chain companies since they are more well known. From this interview though, people will see how Ted really cares about the restaurant and keeping it open for the guests.

Emily Yuris 00:01

Hi, my name is Emily. And with me today is Ted, owner of Loretta, located in Newburyport, Mass. So thank you for speaking with me today. This interview is meant to collect personal experience the restaurants during the pandemic for a digital archive about people's lives under COVID. This is part of a larger project called the COVID-19 Archive, based on [unintelligible] it's mostly archive and institution. History will support my project for digital history, and will also contribute to history as a whole. So it's okay that I record [unintelligible] on the COVID-19 Archive?

Ted Epstein 00:33

Yes.

EY 00:34

Thank you. So, what have you had to adjust in the restaurant since the pandemic hit?

TE 00:40

Boy, just about everything. We had to adjust our staff, we had to adjust the way that we served people, we had to adjust to, at first, not having any indoor dining, we had to adjust in that takeout and delivery business became a very big part of our business. We had to adjust our safety in the way that we approached people and the way that they were approached and the way we allowed them to approach us. Specifically, we have to wear masks all the time. And there have been, it's been very dynamic in--in how it's changed. For us, you know, over time. It's, in fact, it still continues to change with great regularity. I can--I don't think that there have been, you know, more than a few weeks or a month where we haven't had changes in the way that we had to do things. Outdoor dining became a very important part of our business. Takeout went from being a negligible part of our business to a major part of our business, if not the major part of our business. We have--we have had to adjust to having an employee who tested positive from a time where she wasn't here, and how that--how we handled that, with our staff and everybody being

tested. We--we've had the, the, the entire restaurant fogged with an anti--with with a chemical that's been approved by the CDC, the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, and the EPA, it's effective against cold sores too, which is the virus that causes COVID-19, we've had that done twice. Just, just about everything in the restaurant has changed. I really can't think of anything other than the food. Again, the manner in which we serve people, the manner in which we approach people, our expectations of those people and expectations of our staff, having to work with a different budget because of the impact on our revenue. I can probably go on but I think you get the idea for what I'm saying.

EY 03:36

Thank you. A lot of changes.

TE 03:36

A lot of changes.

EY 03:38

Was it hard for you to enact these changes for, like, both the staff and customers?

TE 03:42

Yes, this has been the most challenging time, I've been in the restaurant business for 32 years, and this has been the most challenging time that we've ever encountered, both financially, logistically and emotionally.

EY 04:00

So, what do you think the most challenging change has been? Like, if you had to pick one thing?

TE 04:07

If I had to pick one thing, I would say trying to keep the staff on point of--of doing what they need to do, and at the same time not trying to be so discouraging that work be--becomes difficult.

EY 04:29

So, have you noticed any like changes in the clientele? Has anybody, like, changed, is the same kind of people to come in?

TE 04:36

I don't think that there's been as many changes in the clientele, as there are with clientele that we don't see anymore, that either gets food delivered or taken out or doesn't come anymore. There are some people who who come, you know, just as much or almost as much as they did before, but there's a very large segment of our business that has not returned.

EY 05:06

So, do you think is anything good that came out of this change that you want to keep? Or is it all just been like, you don't want to keep at all?

TE 05:11

I think there are some changes that we've done that actually do work pretty well. I know that we use tablecloths now, as a sanitary measure. But it seems to, it seems to work out well, even though it's a substantial cost. It seems to work out well, for our, for our usage here. And I think with our, with our client satisfaction, I would say that, you know, just working under adversity. You know, you just, like, if you had said to me 10 months ago, that I was going to spend the next year to year and a half with a completely changed business where we have less seats, and where we have less ability to do some of the things we were before interacting with our clients. And a lot of other things, I would have said that, that I can't imagine that we would be able to do that successfully. But I think that what we've seen is that you do what you need to do, and you make the best of it.

EY 06:34

Oh, man. Last question. With winter looming and COVID cases rising, do you think we'll have to make any more changes? Or do you think it'll stay the same?

TE 06:41

I think that there's still going to be many changes to come, even though the the vaccine was, is supposed to be started given today? I think if I'm, if I'm not mistaken. And although I do think that, oh, you know, come the spring or summer business will return to relatively normal. I think that in the meantime, especially with the spike of cases that we're having, and the continued spike that we're anticipating because of the holidays and people's reluctance to not spend the holidays with their family. I think that there are going to be lots more changes, including possibly, you know, closing the restaurant to indoor diners again, I think that we are far from, from the end of this, there does seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. But it, it's unlikely that there won't be significant and challenges and changes that continue to take effect.

EY 07:40

Well, thank you so much for being on camera.

TE 07:42

My pleasure, Emily.