

Cooking by the Book



the innovator's interview

The Innovator's Interview highlights unique innovators from a wide range of industries. It is an opportunity for futurethink and today's most inspiring entrepreneurs to share insights on what large organizations can learn about innovation.



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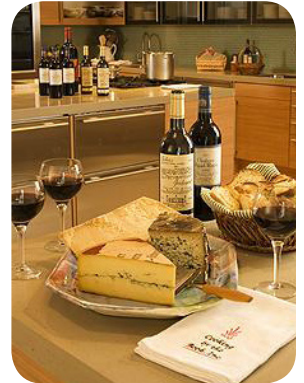
Cooking By the Book

the background

Cooking by the Book was founded in 1989 by Suzen O'Rourke who firmly believed that everyone should be able to benefit from the joys of cooking meals. Suzen enjoyed hosting dinner parties for her friends, but she didn't want her guests to feel obligated to return the favor after leaving. She found that when her guests participated in preparing the meal rather than just coming over and eating, they had a great time, learned some new recipes, and didn't feel indebted after the party. After getting constant requests for her "cooking parties," Suzen decided to formalize the concept and begin offering experience to a wider audience. The company soon discovered a huge potential to market the offering to corporations as a team-building exercise or special event, and Cooking by the Book is now New York's premier culinary team-building destination.

Suzen and her team offer highly customized, hands-on team cooking events for corporate customers who value social activities as a way to facilitate learning and team building. These events are enjoyable, entertaining, and provide participants with a unique sense of accomplishment.

In its comfortable, spacious TriBeCa loft, Cooking by the Book offers highly customizable team building and social events that are led by experienced chefs and facilitators, depending on the specific activities desired. Customers include major legal and financial firms, who enjoy bringing summer associate classes to CBTB for an innovative offsite. CBTB's kitchen is also the dedicated location for testing recipes and shooting pictures for the famed *Joy of Cooking* cookbook.



Company: Cooking by the Book

Address: 13 Worth Street, Third Floor
New York, NY 10013

Web URL: www.cookingbythebook.com

Founders: Suzen O'Rourke

Innovation: Cooking by the Book offers a unique team-building activity that's used to foster new and creative ways of thinking for teams in any organization.



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future**think** had the opportunity to sit down with Suzen O'Rourke, Cooking by the Book's founder, in the company's TriBeCa location to learn a little more about the company, its experience working with large corporations, and what Suzen has learned about innovation.

Is there such a thing as a bad idea?

Yes. Something that's only self-serving or only for the sake of making money.

So, where do the best ideas come from?

Passion. The best ideas are driven by what you need to do. I needed people to cook with me, and that's how I got started. I needed to teach people how to feed themselves.

Where do you go to get inspired?

Santa Fe. Europe—Italy, France—I always look for creativity, new trends, the undiscovered.

How does Cooking by the Book define innovation?

Something that no one has done before, and that's needed in the market.

How do you go about generating new ideas?

We really just look at how we can serve our customers better.

How do you choose new ideas to move forward with?

Everything needs to be accessible to the layperson—we're not about teaching culinary pros. A good idea is something our customers will want to come back and do again. We listen to our clients.

As you grow, how do you try and maintain the forward momentum and energy of a start-up company?

We want to stay small—no larger than 30 people. We need to keep our philosophies intact—training is paramount so that all our people understand our philosophy.

On a scale of 1–10, 1 being low, 10 being high, what would you say is your appetite for risk?

A six. I'm pretty conservative for the most part, and I don't ever take risks with our clients' health or safety. With my business, we make decisions based on what we hear from our clients, so there's usually demand for the services we're offering.



“The best ideas are driven by what you need to do... I needed to teach people how to feed themselves.”



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How would you describe a person that's "good" at innovation?

Good innovators should know their limits—know what they're good at and what they're capable of, and move forward from there. If you know what you're good at and what you're not good at, you can surround yourself with people who can help you out where you're lacking, and that'll help you do a better job. They should know how to take a calculated, well-informed risk.

What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs trying to move an innovative idea forward?

Give your business attention, but enjoy your life. Your business should be something you enjoy—you're going to spend a lot of time doing it. And make sure you give yourself an exit strategy—do not put all your resources in one idea.

How would this advice be different for a Fortune 500 company?

It wouldn't.

What are the "barriers to innovation" for a larger organization?

Thinking outside the box. They're so focused on doing things a certain way in order to achieve certain results, and that really limits their thinking.

How can they overcome these barriers?

It's hard for big companies—but the best way is to shake things up with new leadership. It's easier to change when there's a new person leading the way—that new person symbolizes change.

What do you think is your greatest strength as an innovator? Your greatest weakness?

My greatest strengths would be my energy and passion. I don't stop. My greatest weakness is definitely a dislike for the details—I'm about the ideas, and I'm not really into the execution. So, I surround myself with people who are good at the details—its about a team effort, and we all compensate for each others' weaknesses.



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Want to tell us your innovation story?

Contact Josh Kutticherry at jkutticherry@getfuturethink.com,
and tell us why your business is innovative and what other
organizations can learn from your experiences as an innovator.



What do you need
to better innovate?