

Dan Schickentanz

Dan Schickentanz founded 'degustibus' in 1990 and developed it from home baking to a business employing over 45 people with deliveries to London, Oxford, Reading, Birmingham and the Cotswolds. He was Baker of the Year in '97 and '98, awarded Best in Britain in '96 -'97 and received small business marketing awards in '96. In '99 he became a business partner with TV chef Valentina Harris and teaches baking at Villa Valentina, Tuscany. He appears frequently on TV, in newspapers and lifestyle magazines.

In his unique style, Dan told of his experiences in building up his business. The science of the kitchen had always fascinated him and hallmarked his life. He thanked Jean Grieves for asking him to talk about his success as this had made him think about himself. He said he wished he could stand up and say that his success was based on a thorough market research, implementing intelligence gathered at the time and applied in a business plan. However he suggested that his success was more a 'witches brew of some newts, frogs legs, snake blood, etc.' but in short it was due to necessity, fool-hearted recklessness, no where else to go and a good smack on the cheeks by Lady Luck.

Dan had been cooking since the age of 15 and learnt in a summer programme cooking rather than playing football. Why suddenly baking? Again he wished he had a clever answer like 'I knew by the age of 9 that I wanted to become a doctor and save the world from diseases'. In reality it felt more like a Miss World Pageant but without the good looks!

Dan had studied law and business but was cooking and bar-tending all the time to finance his courses. His impatience brought on, at the age of 33, a mid-life crisis. At school in Minneapolis he took a self-assessment test and this was an eye opener to him. He started to look for other examples to reassure himself that he was going in the right direction. He found that biographies of others provided many examples.

Throughout his career Dan has strived for perfection. He believed wholeheartedly in the underlying principle of doing your best. He learned by the examples and passion of Raymond Blanc and Rick Stein. He felt they all worked to please both themselves and others. Dan worked hard at being proactive to the demands of his customers. He believed in attention to detail. His passion for baking would never die and he would continue to search for the Holy Grail – the perfect food, bread, book, drink, film etc.

Dan left the audience with no doubts about his passion and enthusiasm for baking and he delighted the audience with his humour and anecdotes about his life and business experiences.