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Session 6 discussion: Innovation in eating patterns

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Q: You had data to show that millennials eat out less because millennials want to cook at home. Are there data to show that millennials *want* to cook at home or do millennials *have* to cook at home because of debt? Millennials are the first generation to have such large debts, like student loans, so they don't have the option to eat out as much as past generations.

R[DL]: But yet millennials are still spending a lot of money on food, specifically in the urban environment. Millennials are aged 20–36 and are in very different places in life but all do have paralyzing student debt. It's a great point but there are factions inside of it. The application is if millennials are cooking less/eating at home less, they have significantly more interest in cooking than their parents did. They find it fun and engaging, and they've come to realize that to access the things they want from a health perspective, that it is required. This is where only 7% of the food industry has shown up to address this. Though the difference, and what I'm predicting, is that as they move from the urban landscape, they will cook and we will see time around a dinner table grow for the first time in three generations. That's the essence of the point.

Q: If your vision is more prepared meals made available- who is responsible for nutrition quality? Are you letting consumers tell you what you they want? Do you have an obligation to put foods in front of people that meet dietary guidelines? Where is the emphasis here and who is responsible?

R[DL]: We have to be responsible as an organization. First of all, our organization does not provide cooked food, we provide prepped food. Our food is frozen and there are many reasons for that. The fully prepped component allows us to completely control all facets of nutrition. In our business model, we have 17 entrees a month and every month they all go away and are replaced with 17 new entrees. The best sellers might return every 3–6 months but, generally, to get an American family to adopt the lifestyle, you can't just slot 6 entrees in a store. They already know how to cook 6 entrees so you have to give them a rotating lifecycle. So inside of our nutritional structure, we actually have the ability to segment. If someone wants to live a heart healthy life, our nutritionist and dietitians are responsible for navigating that every month so we have that option for the customer. Our

goal is to get America to eat healthier than they currently are. That's not accomplished by “yo-yo-“dieting” i.e. adopting a healthy eating pattern and then going back to the old unhealthy lifestyle. We are focused on lifestyle adoption. Our entire mechanism is designed to ask if we can get permission to hold you accountable and get your family back around a dinner table. A lot of customers just want to come in and out- that's their style- but that's what creates the havoc in their life. We have to make sure that the product offering from our nutritionist and dietitians delivers to multiple spectrums of flavor profiles and paces of life. The consumer then chooses within those options based on what is important to them.

Q: I was struck by these presentations about how parent behavior is changing. The way that parents are approaching meal times has to change because of the pace of life that challenges them i.e. soccer practice, work stress, partners, and schedules. What is the industry standard or approach about helping parents mitigate those stresses and talking to them about how to make mealtime a more positive space? I presented a poster about responsive feeding which is an approach to help parents engage. We found pretty consistently that a more positive meal climate is related to better fruit and vegetable intake in young children and that fewer distractions at mealtime make it easier for parents to use these responsive eating practices. What is the industry approach right now and how can we support families in this?

R[SS]: Gerber offers a lot of services like Dotti which is a new texting service. So, you can text Dotti 24/7 and you'll get a live person texting you back in a similar millennial speech and slang to give them a really personalized experience. But I am not sure how many people are going to reach out to Gerber for this. If you reach out to Gerber, we have registered dietitians and even a sleep consultant to help consumers with their problems. We have a lot of resources and services and we are targeting the next generation with features such as voice activation. Hopefully, technologies akin to Amazon's Alexa will connect you with Dotti in the near future. I think it's about gaining that credibility with the millennial generation. I was a Gerber baby so, of course, I fed my kids Gerber, but that's not the millennial generation. Millennials are not brand loyal like and they are seeking out the help of their friends, the internet, or phone applications for their information. So, there are

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services available that are trying to meet the formats that millennials want. I think for babies, that this is really important. Responsive feeding is exactly the way to go so that we can provide that structure, space, and healthy food and let the child decide how much and what they want to eat. That's the message that we want to send, but we have to back it up with the products as well. The meat sticks from my presentation are still on the market after 45 years and there has never been a choking incident. A lot of our products are outdated and we don't have a huge organic offering. We are trying to catch up with the products and then provide the services and education along with it. We have to figure out what the right venue is and what the right message is to reach these millennial parents.

R[DL]: Corporations are not evil. You just heard unbelievable honesty from a scientist that works for a major food corporation saying that their product isn't what it should be. Corporations actually have the capability to bring forth solutions, from a technology stand point and engage with the culture. The problem is that corporations just aren't trusted by the millennial generation. Non-profits don't have the same resources that Nestle has to bring forth solutions that can bring a peaceful content or an impactful dinner environment to the table. The biggest thing, from the industry's perspective, that we need help on is

fear. I am hopeful that the aspects of the millennial generation that get ridiculed so often comes forth as a strength. The fact that millennials are anti-judgement. The Gen X moms grew up likely as parents in the most judgmental generation. If women worked, they were judged. If they were stay-at-home moms, they were judged. Research shows that this generation of women is very judgmental of each other and ask themselves where they rank in relation to their peers. For example, the status of my son playing baseball or football became material to me as a mom. Millennials are not that way. I am really hopeful that the fear of judgement disappears because that is what has kept Gen X moms away from our model. Am I going to go into a store where I will be the only woman who doesn't cook in America? Am I going to get exposed for the fraud that I am? That mom doesn't know that only one of the 12 customers in our store at that time can actually cook these meals on their own but they just don't have time to do so. The rest of the 11 in the store had to overcome fear to step into that environment. It is the biggest restriction to success in this business model. We need to focus on eliminating the fear and bringing awareness to a population of new moms that don't know how to cook. We need to make it okay to not be an expert in the kitchen. Gen X did not make it okay and that really held them back.