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## Simon Goggin - My Life in Hospitality

(04 December 2009 15:39)



*Simon Goggin* is the founder and director of event caterer Cooks & Partners.

Simon Goggin began his catering career when he left school at 15 with one O level to join a local pub-restaurant as kitchen porter, while he studied for his City and Guilds 7061 and 7062 at college.

He then left to join an Essex country hotel as a commis chef where, after just six months, he was promoted to demi chef de partie pastry, and this was where his passion for pastry began. "I loved the science of it," he says. "I find the chemical reactions really interesting."

In order to gain more experience, Goggin left a year later and took up various temporary positions in restaurants and hotels around London before, at just 19, he joined the Michelin-starred Leith's restaurant in Notting Hill as chef de partie pastry.

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Two years on, an opportunity to join Prue Leith's outside catering company Leith's Events and Parties put Goggin's career in fast-forward. His hard work and self-confessed dedication to exceeding expectations was rewarded with promotion to the position of sous chef, then after only six months, to head chef, overseeing a core group of 20 chefs.

Goggin quickly became executive chef, overseeing menu and chef development in venues including the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre, the restaurant within the English Speaking Union, and the Law Society, with its event business and brasserie open to the public.

He remained with Leith's until Compass Group bought it out in 1995. This prompted him to take his eight years' experience in outside catering and go it alone. "I decided I wanted to carry on providing event catering that was personal and bespoke. Setting up on my own was the only way I felt I could achieve this," he explains. "I didn't want to become just a number in a large company."

In December 1997, Goggin registered Cooks & Partners at Companies House and trading began. "We grew quickly, thanks mainly to word of mouth, and it wasn't long before we formed the contract catering side of the business. Our first win was a three-year deal with the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express."

Goggin's determination to explore different commercial opportunities and expand the business saw Cooks & Partners awarded their first in-house contract in 2000, running the café within the V&A's Museum of Childhood in east London.

Two years ago, Goggin retired from the kitchen, in order to concentrate on business growth - a decision he did not take lightly. "I still miss it," he admits. "For the first six months I really struggled with not being creative."

The advice Goggin gives to anyone hoping to emulate his success is to believe in what you do. "Make sure you only ever under-promise and over-deliver, never the other way around, and always be truthful to your clients," he urges.

**HIGHS...** Starting my own business in a competitive market and building a team that wanted to work together to create a very successful catering company was fantastic. Events catering is so varied, we get a lot of interesting requests and each contract is different.

Our clients are all so different and they can ask for some really wacky and wonderful stuff. On one occasion we were asked for - and delivered - 500 pairs of chocolate boobies.

**LOWS...** Times were tough when Leith's Events and Parties was bought by Compass. There were 25 chefs under me working in a cloud of uncertainty. Morale was extremely low. In the end I took some of them with me when I decided to set up on my own. My contracts manager was the office manager at Leith's, and the sous chef at the time is now head chef at Cooks & Partners.

**Age** 41

**Family** Living with partner

**Favourite holiday** Family house in Nerja, Spain

**Drives** BMW

**Motto** Believe in yourself and trust others to achieve business goals

### RECESSION-BUSTING TIP

Make sure you deliver at the price you promise, examine different markets and don't be afraid to diversify.

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