

BUSINESS BOOK SUMMARY

2 Books Every F&B Owner Should Read Before Scaling Up

From Danny Meyer's philosophy of hospitality to Roger Fields' formula for restaurant profitability — a condensed summary with an action checklist for restaurants, cafes, and food businesses in Vietnam.

HOSPITALITY MINDSET

Setting the Table

Danny Meyer

OPERATING FINANCE

Restaurant Success by the Numbers

Roger Fields

What's Inside

5 sections, 12-minute read

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F&B in Vietnam has never been more competitive. These two books — one by the founder of one of America's leading hospitality groups, one by an accountant turned restaurant owner — give you both halves of the picture: **customer emotion** and **financial survival**.

Setting the Table

Danny Meyer • Founder of Union Square Hospitality Group (Shake Shack, Gramercy Tavern)

Danny Meyer calls his philosophy "**Enlightened Hospitality**": the order of priority doesn't start with the customer — it starts with your own employees. When employees are well cared for, they naturally take better care of customers than any SOP could ever teach.

1 The 5-tier priority order

Employees → Guests → Community → Suppliers → Investors. It sounds backwards, but it's what creates a genuine culture of service from the inside out, instead of customers receiving "fake service" forced through a script.

2 Hospitality ≠ Good Service

Service is technical — the right dish, on time, by the book. Hospitality is emotional — making the customer feel genuinely cared for. A place can have flawless service and still feel cold; hospitality is what brings people back.

3 Hire on a "49/51" basis

Meyer hires 51% based on personal qualities (warmth, curiosity, work ethic, emotional intelligence) and only 49% on technical skill. Skills can be taught — attitude is far harder to teach.

4 Turn mistakes into opportunities

How you handle a problem (a wrong dish, a long wait, a complaint) matters more than never having problems at all. Customers often remember a well-handled mistake more fondly than a flawless meal.



Business, like life, is ultimately about how you make people feel.

— DANNY MEYER, SETTING THE TABLE

Restaurant Success by the Numbers

Roger Fields • Accountant turned restaurant owner

Passion for cooking doesn't save a restaurant that's losing money. Roger Fields treats F&B as a pure financial problem — and that's exactly why this book is useful: it hands you a formula, not just inspiration.

1 Food cost % is your compass

Every menu item should be priced against a target food cost percentage (typically 28-35%). Not knowing this number means you're running the business blind.

2 Know break-even before scaling

Know your exact monthly break-even revenue before hiring more staff or opening a second location — the most common mistake that bankrupts restaurants that "feel" like they're growing.

3 Labor cost \leq 30-35%

Labor cost plus food cost (prime cost) exceeding 65% of revenue is a red flag that needs action now — not at the end of the quarter.

4 Forecast cash flow weekly

Restaurants die from running out of cash, not from lacking profit on paper. Track cash flow weekly, not monthly.

28-35%

Target food cost / item revenue

\leq 65%

Safe prime cost (food + labor)

Weekly

Minimum cash flow review frequency



Setting realistic goals helps you determine the right type and size of restaurant for you — leading to a workable financial plan instead of a dream on paper.

— ROGER FIELDS, RESTAURANT SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS

10 Actions to Apply This Week

A practical checklist — no need to finish the books first

- 1. Calculate food cost % for your top 5 best-sellers**
If any item exceeds 35%, revisit pricing or ingredient portions.
- 2. Write down your monthly break-even point**
The minimum revenue needed to cover rent, staff, and ingredients.
- 3. Interview new hires on a 49/51 basis**
Ask two attitude/values questions for every one skills-based question.
- 4. Set a standard complaint-handling process**
A simple script: listen → apologize → offer a concrete fix → thank them.
- 5. Review cash flow every Monday**
15 minutes a week checking balance, upcoming receivables and payables.
- 6. Measure prime cost monthly**
Add food cost + labor cost; if it's over 65% of revenue, plan an adjustment now.
- 7. Run a 10-minute pre-shift huddle**
Share the day's specials and reinforce service values — not just task assignments.
- 8. Survey your 10 most regular customers**
Ask what brings them back — and what makes them hesitant to refer friends.
- 9. Audit your menu by profit matrix**
Sort items by popularity and margin; cut items that are both low-selling and low-margin.
- 10. Set one concrete hospitality goal this month**
Example: every returning customer is greeted by name from their second visit on.

Applying This to F&B in Vietnam

From Korean restaurants in Phu My Hung to traditional Vietnamese eateries

These two frameworks aren't just theory — they speak directly to the real challenges F&B owners face in HCMC today: rising rent competition, fluctuating import ingredient costs, and pressure to retain service staff.

✓ For Korean restaurants and foreign-customer venues

Enlightened hospitality matters even more across a language barrier — warmth in service makes up for imperfect communication, and is what keeps expat and overseas customers coming back.

✓ For new openings with limited capital

Calculate break-even from day one, before investing heavily in decor or marketing. Many businesses in Vietnam fail not from too few customers, but from not knowing the minimum revenue required to survive.

✓ For chains and franchises scaling up

Prime cost (food + labor) should be standardized across locations before expanding — opening a new branch before the original financial model is stable doubles the risk instead of doubling the profit.

NEXT STEP

You've got the mindset. Now build a brand that matches it.

MSVN partners with F&B brands across Ho Chi Minh City to build marketing strategy, brand presence, and customer growth — from new openings to scaling chains.

Get a Free Consultation

Marketing Solutions Vietnam (MSVN) · Ho Chi Minh City
This guide was prepared by the MSVN team for our F&B clients and partners.