

Chapter 6.

The Name Game

We know what we like, right?

Not as much as we think. Our “taste” resides in our head as well as in our mouth. We often taste what we *think* we will taste. In the same way our mindless eating can lead us to overeat, our expectations about the taste of a food can “trick our tastebuds,”¹ making us think a food tastes much better or worse than it actually does.

Knowing how this works is a big deal if you are a \$200,000-a-year chef, a Navy cook, a brand manager, or a food critic. It is also a big deal if you’re a mother who is trying to encourage her family to eat their vegetables, a Food Network fan, or a weekend chef who wants people to eat the food you make and love it.

Eating in the Dark

Although the guards who will first stop you at the sentry post are well-armed – at one point with 30-caliber machine guns – this is not in the Pentagon, or buried in a secret mountain cave. It is tucked away in the quiet town of Natick, Massachusetts – about 30 miles west of Boston. This is home to the US Army Natick Soldier Center. In these Labs, the US Army does most of the research on what soldiers eat, what they should eat, and how to get them to do it. This is big business, but when it comes to soldier welfare and effectiveness, it gets elevated to an issue of national security.

In addition to the three sensory experts who run the Natick Labs (Drs. Herb Meiselman, Armand Cardello, and Rick Bell) a *Who's Who* list of researchers from Finland, England, France, and the US, have pilgrimaged there to brainstorm and conduct studies. Many will examine how colors, wrappers, expiration dates, labeled ingredients, logos, and packaging change what soldiers think of the taste of food and how much they eat.²

Here's the problem. When soldiers are first deployed in a combat situation, they are often overworked and overstressed but they tend to undereat. Even though they are given plenty of food and even when given plenty of time to eat it, they simply do not eat enough of it and they begin losing weight. Some of those studies with colors, wrappers, and packaging are aimed at tricking a soldier's tastebuds into liking a food and eating enough of it to stay alert, strong, and safe.

Take the case of eating in the dark. Soldiers frequently have to eat when it's dark, and they do not always know what exactly they are eating. When it's dark, do they taste what they think they will taste?

When I was on sabbatical there in 2004, this was one of the questions we tackled. We invited 84 Natick Lab employees (in squad-size groups of eight) to rate the taste of some new strawberry yogurts the Army was developing. We told them that because soldiers often eat meals in the dark, we wanted to make sure foods tasted good even if they could not be seen.

We then turned out the lights in the lab.

And we did not give them strawberry yogurt. We gave them chocolate yogurt. It did not seem to matter very much. The mere suggestion that they were eating strawberry

yogurt lead 53 of 80 people to rate it as having a good strawberry taste. One even said that strawberry yogurt was her favorite yogurt and this would be her new favorite brand.³ Soldiers, just like us, use all sorts of cues or signals to help taste food. One of these is our eyesight. If it doesn't look like strawberry, it doesn't taste like strawberry. But another important cue is the name of a food. If we can not see the food and someone tells us we are going to taste strawberry, we taste strawberry, even if it is really chocolate.

A rose may be a rose by any other name. This is not true with food. Within extremes, we taste what we think we will taste.

They Call the Jell-O, Yellow.

That's right. Lemon Jell-O is yellow, right? Billy disagrees.

Billy had one of the toughest cooking jobs in the world. He could only order food and cooking supplies once every four months. He and his adopted family could never leave and eat anywhere else for those four months. Nearly every member of his family was overworked, overstressed, and fearing for their lives. There were also 1200 of them, and almost all were males between 18 and 30.

Billy was a World War II Navy cook, and we corresponded when our lab was conducting a large-scale survey of how the war had changed the food habits of those involved in the war.⁴ He was a true Iron Chef. From Pearl Harbor to Midway Billy was in charge of keeping 1200 people happy for three meals a day. He learned tricks to make that happen.

On what turned out to be one particularly long tour, Billy discovered that he had accidentally ordered twice as much lemon Jell-O as he had needed, but no cherry Jell-O.

Small things can make big differences when people are under stress, and sure enough, two months out, some sailors began complaining that there was no cherry Jell-O. On one occasion a fight broke out over this. There were pointed remarks that such carelessness should result in Billy being reprimanded or even demoted.

In the face of growing rebellion, Billy got creative. He made lemon Jell-O as usual, but added red food coloring to it. Of course it was still lemon-flavored, but it looked like cherry Jell-O.

When it was served, no one thought differently. Some sailors even complimented him on finding the cherry Jell-O. He served the red lemon Jell-O twice more before returning to port and restocking. No one suspected what happened. By simply coloring the Jell-O, Billy gave sailors the opportunity to taste what they expected to taste.

Why can we be so easily and mindlessly fooled when it comes to taste? Psychologists call this “expectation assimilation” and “confirmation bias.” In the case of food, it means that our taste buds are biased by our imagination. Basically, if you expect a food to taste good, it will. At the very least, it will taste better than if you had thought it would only be so-so in the first place

But expectation assimilation also works in the opposite direction. If you expect a food to taste bad, it will.

Billy probably could not explain the psychology behind his Jell-O trick, but he intuitively knew it would work. When the sailors saw red-colored Jell-O they expected it to taste great because cherry Jell-O tastes great. Even though it might have tasted a bit odd, they still believe it tasted better than if it had been yellow. “Seeing red” was enough to transform lemon to cherry.

Changing Jell-O colors may seem may seem like a trivial point, but it is not. The exact same principle is at work in every fine restaurant and with every home kitchen gourmet. They call it “presentation.”

While the French say “We taste first with our eyes,” the Japanese talk about “katachi no aji,” which means “the shape of the taste.” Expensive-looking gold-trimmed plates, exotic shavings of garnish, artsy squiggles of sauce from squirt bottles . . . all of these peak our expectations that the food will taste great. And they work.

Consider the power of plates alone.⁵ At the end of lunchtime in the Bevier Cafeteria, in Urbana, Illinois, 120 people were given a free brownie dusted with powdered sugar. They were told it was a new recipe that the cafeteria was thinking of adding to the dessert section, and they were asked what they thought of it and how much they would be willing to pay for it. Every brownie was the exact same size and from the exact same recipe. The one difference was the way it was presented. Forty people were handed their brownie on a shining snow white piece of china; 40 were given their brownie on a paper plate; and 40 were given it on a napkin.

Those who were presented their brownie on china claimed this new brownie recipe was excellent. A number of them even commented on the efforts the chef was making to upgrade the cafeteria. Those who had eaten their brownie off the paper plate said the brownie was “good” and then continued the conversation they were having with their lunch friends. Those who were served their brownie on the napkin rated it as “Okay, but nothing special.”

How much is this information worth to a cafeteria that sells 12,000 brownies a year? To find out, we asked these same people how much they would pay for the brownie they ate. The people who were served the brownie on china said they would be willing to pay an average of \$1.13. Paper-plate brownies averaged 72 cents, while those eating off a napkin said they would come up with only 59 cents for the same taste experience. That difference between the china brownie and the napkin brownie is 54 cents. That translates into \$6,480 a year. That buys a lot of nice dishes.

Menu Magic

Smart restaurant owners know that the difference between profit and loss can take place before the food is even ordered.⁶ This is why they craft and recraft the décor, lighting, music, and table-settings to create positive expectations. They also create great expectations by using descriptive, tasty words.

We see this across all kinds of successful restaurants – low-end to high-end. Take menu names. For under \$5, you can buy a Black Angus Monster burger, Cheese Lovers Delight personal pan pizza, and a Baja Fiesta Tacos value meal, and the genuine genius of McDonald's "Happy Meals."

In the middle of the eating spectrum, the mid-level restaurant chains give their foods names such as Jack Daniels[®] Chicken, Psychedelic Sorbet[®], or the Bloomin' Onion[®]. On the white tablecloth end of the culinary spectrum, Tennyson and Keats wannabes name foods such as Boeuf Provençal en gelée.

A menu in a Tuscan-style Italian restaurant in the Hanover, New Hampshire area describes one dish as being "graced with Spring-fresh medallions of well-mannered

beef.” Well-mannered beef? Are there cows out there who say, “I realize I’m 6 hours away from becoming an entrée, but I’m okay with that. But enough about me. How are you doing?” Doubtful. Yet if these menu names and descriptions seem so ridiculous out of context, why are they so common?

They are common because they WORK. They work in two ways. First, they entice us to buy the food. Second, they lead us to expect it will taste good, which pretty much preprograms our tastebuds.

Consider two pieces of day-old chocolate cake. If one is named “chocolate cake,” and the other is named “Belgian Black Forest Double Chocolate Cake,” people will buy the second. That is no surprise. What is more interesting is that after trying it, people will rate it as tasting better than an identical piece of “plain old cake.” It doesn’t even matter that the Black Forest is not in Belgium.

We know this is true because we tested it in the real world.

Back to the Bevier Cafeteria. Cafeteria food like, school hot lunches, has its share of image problems. This one particular cafeteria was trying to enhance its image while also encouraging people to buy more of their vegetable side-dishes and healthier foods. How could this be done? By changing the names of the foods.

We took six different foods – vegetables, main dishes, and low-fat desserts – and offered them on different days. Sometimes they had their traditional name and sometimes they had a slightly more descriptive name. Every day for six weeks we rotated these foods on and off the menu so no one would become suspicious. One day Red Beans and Rice would be offered, and two weeks later it would reappear as Traditional Cajun Red Beans with Rice. One week you could buy the Succulent Italian

Seafood Filet for \$2.90; the next week the Seafood Filet was available at the same price.

Exact same food; slightly different names.⁷

Which Menu Has the Better Food?

Menu A.

- Red Beans with Rice
- Seafood Filet
- Grilled Chicken
- Chicken Parmesan
- Chocolate Pudding
- Zucchini Cookies

Menu B.

- Traditional Cajun Red Beans with Rice
- Succulent Italian Seafood Filet
- Tender Grilled Chicken
- Home-style Chicken Parmesan
- Satin Chocolate Pudding
- Grandma's Zucchini Cookies

Anybody who bought one of the six foods – either labeled or unlabeled – was discretely observed while they ate. When they were close to being finished, they were asked to fill out a short 1/2 page survey that asked them to rate the food and the cafeteria. There were a number of interesting discoveries.

First, before we even got to the survey, the foods with the descriptive names sold 27% more.⁸ And even though they had the exact same prices and were the exact same foods, the customers who ate them consistently rated them as a better value than did the people who ate the same dishes with the boring-old names.

What's on Today's Hot Lunch Menu?⁹

A peek at the hot lunch menus from two schools gives us an idea of what awaits the next generation of Italian food lovers.

Phillips Exeter Academy

Exeter, New Hampshire

1050 students

\$25,500 tuition (day school)

"Huc venite, pueri, ut viri sitis"

Philip High School

Philip, South Dakota

885 people – in the town

\$31,103 average income

"Home of the mighty Philip Scotties"

Menu (2-13-06)

White bean soup

Menu (2-13-06)

Pizza

Pea's homemade tomato olive bread	Corn
Baked ziti	Peach
Honey dipped fried chicken	Milk
Spinach tomato rice	
Caesar salad	

But what about the taste? A nice name might lead to raving expectations, but can't it also lead to a backlash? "Succulent Italian Seafood Filet . . . no way, this tastes more like a dry fishstick!" After all, truth be told, this food was nothing special.

Not so. The foods with descriptive names were rated as more appealing and tastier than the identical foods with the less attractive labels.¹⁰ Furthermore, when asked what they thought about the foods, the diners eating the descriptive foods tended to claim that they were "fantastic" or "great menu items."

Yet something else was found which was of particular interest to this cafeteria. The customers who ate the food with descriptive names had more favorable attitudes toward the cafeteria as a whole. They comment that it was trendy and up-to-date. Others thought the chef was probably classically trained, perhaps in Europe. Again, the foods were exactly alike. The only difference was the addition of one or two descriptive words. These one or two words changed sales, tastes, and attitudes toward the restaurant.

We see this across all kinds of restaurants.¹¹ But nowhere is it more common than at the top-end restaurants. Why? Perhaps, because people who own, manage, and cook in these restaurants are very serious about their food, and have vocabularies to match.

These high-end restaurants are more calculated when they craft the names of foods. They use vivid adjectives to trigger our expectations, often drawing on one or more of four basic themes:¹²

- 1. Geographic Labels:** Words that create an image or ideology of a geographic area associated with the food. Think Southwestern Tex-Mex Salad, Iowa Pork Chops, “Real” Carolina Barbeque, or Country Peach Tart.
- 2. Nostalgic Labels:** Alluding to the past can trigger happy associations of family, tradition, national origin, and wholesomeness. Think Classic Old World Manicotti, Legendary Chocolate Mousse Pie, Green Gables Matzo Ball Soup, and Grandma’s Chicken Soup.
- 3. Sensory Labels:** Describing the taste, smell, and mouth feel of the menu item can raise expectations. Dessert Chefs accomplish this masterfully -- note names like “Velvety Chocolate Mousse” – but main course items also appear as Hearty Sizzling Steaks, Snappy Seasonal Carrots, and Buttery Plump Pasta
- 4. Brand Labels:** The idea of cross-promotions is not new, but it is now catching on fast in the chain and franchise restaurant world. They essentially tell us, “If you love the brand, you will love this menu item.” That’s why we can buy Black Angus® Beef Burgers, Jack Daniels® BBQ Ribs, and Butterfinger® Blizzards.

For the high-end restaurants this translates into Kobe Beef kabob or the Niman Ranch pork-loin.

Does such labeling ever backfire? Does anyone ever eat the Belgian Black Forest Double Chocolate cake and say: “Ugh, this is just that dried old stuff left over from yesterday?” Oddly enough, it doesn’t seem to happen except in almost laughably extreme instances. If the food is reasonably good, it will nearly always benefit from these descriptions.

Of course, most restaurants that stay in business do so because they are not in the habit of disappointing people. Calling yesterday’s goulash “Royal Hungarian Top Sirloin Blend” may generate a first time sale, but it may also be the last. A restaurant that makes a habit out of tricking customers into buying something they do not like probably will not be listed in next year’s Yellow Pages.

The Other Iron Chef

In the December 2004 issue of the magazine, *The New Scientist*, Graham Lawton wrote a fun article on some of our findings, titled “Angelic Host.”¹³ In it, he reported how a person can use a variety of cues – like names, plating, candles, and soft music – to make dinner guests think they are having a great holiday meal.

Toward the end of the interview he confessed to using a unique cue of his own. While his guests enjoy wine and appetizers in the living room, he excuses himself to “prepare the rest of the meal.” Now the meal has pretty much been prepared for three hours, but if his guests did not think he was slaving away on it, they would not think it was going to be very good. He simply retires to the kitchen for 15 minutes with his wine and occasionally bangs his iron pots around.

He sounds busy → he must be working hard → this will be a great meal → it is!

Brand Name Psychosis.

There is actually a soft drink bottled and sold in central Pennsylvania called “*It* Cola.” *It* tastes like Coca-Cola but costs half as much. If you were to go to the Cumberland convenience store in Gettysburg, you can either pay \$1.25 for a 20 ounce bottle of Coke or 45 cents for a 20 ounce bottle of *It*. I saved 80 cents and in a “close your eyes and try this” taste-test, it tasted about the same to the colleague I was with.

Is Coke worried about losing market share in the Gettysburg metropolitan area? No. There are lots of people still willing to shell out the extra 75 cents to drink the “Real Thing” instead of the “*It* Thing.” When they see a Coke label, they expect the soft drink to taste good. They take a sip and it does taste good. When they see an *It* label, they expect the cola to taste not-so-good, and as a result, it does.

Brand names, like Coke, Snickers, Frosted Flakes, Frito-Lay, and Ben & Jerry all have a big advantage over store brands like Sam’s Choice or President’s Club. Once the labels are off, however, it is probably a toss-up which brand is best. A number of studies have tested popular brand names next to inexpensive store brands. Some even take people who claim to be 100% loyal to a brand, such as potato chips, and then give them a number of different chips to taste and to rate. Despite what they say, most people can not pick out their brand once it is out of the package and into a bowl.

So why doesn’t everyone buy the less expensive store brands and generic goodies. One reason is that we like to remind ourselves – and others – that we are not hopelessly cheap. We may not be able to afford a BMW, but at least we are not so broke that we have to drink *It* Cola.

But here is the bigger reason: Most people think products with famous brand names are better. Because we think they are better, we experience them as better. It's not just the brand name, it's the advertising, the packaging, and pricing. All contribute to our positive expectations. And it works.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the so-called "sin industries" of beer, liquor and wine. Take beer. In the age before micro-brews differences between standard American beers were subtle if not invisible. That is, once the labels are off, it is a toss-up which brand is which. Studies have been done where college students who claim to be "brand loyal" beer drinkers are asked to taste and rate a number of unlabeled beers. Once the labels come off the beers, or once they are poured into a glass, all bets are off.¹⁴ Few weekend partiers can pick their beer out of the crowd once the label has been picked off.

To date, the people at *Consumer Reports* have yet to engage in taste tests with different brands of vodkas. They do not need to. Since almost all unflavored vodkas are comprised only of ethyl-alcohol, there probably would not be any difference. The smoothness might differ, but not the taste. Still, while a generic brand charges \$4 for a brain-numbing bottle, high-end brands charge over \$30. How can they do so? In addition to a couple more rounds of distillation, they create a mystique with cool advertisements of icy Russian winters or with hip, high-profile packaging. Indeed, the elaborate packaging for new vodkas may not only get one to order it, but dollars to rubles it will make the person think it tastes better than it actually does.

Brands also help pique our taste expectations by the way they are priced. A number of years ago, a college junior had finally been able to get a date with the woman

he already dreamed he would marry. He planned to start with picnic near a pond and then take her bowling (back when bowling was apparently romantic). He wanted to pack wine with the picnic. On a thin budget, however, he was not able to afford a bottle of Château Mouton Rothschild 1945. Instead he selected a \$1.99 screw-top bottle of Night Train Express with a black and white, semi-crooked label. Instead of being aged for decades in the cellar of a French chateau, it had aged on the truck on the way to the store. Knowing that a \$2 bottle of wine was unlikely to impress his date, he explained the story and asked the weekend wine clerk to make a new fake price label that read “\$9.99.”

During the picnic he elegantly unscrewed the top from the wine as he imagined James Bond or Cary Grant might have done. He then poured it into Styrofoam cups and proposed a toast. After taking a sip and wincing, the woman of his dreams picked up the wine bottle. Her expression changed when she saw the \$9.99 label that he had so carefully left on. She said, “This is expensive. It’s good.”

Although we moved on to different vintages after graduation, we still enjoy working a Night Train Express joke into an occasional conversation or Christmas note.

Grape Expectations: Choosing the Right Wine

How can you select the perfect bottle of wine for a dinner party? Rest easy in the knowledge that most people cannot distinguish great wine from good wine, or even pretty good wine from mediocre wine.

Most people use a two step approach to buying wine: They choose a price-level, say \$10, and they then look for a bottle with a nice-looking label. Based on what we know about expectations, this makes perfect sense. If the name, origin, graphics, or shape of a wine bottle lead us to expect it will taste good, it probably will taste good to us.

So other than thinking twice about the North Dakota wine, try to stay away from wines named Nasti Spumante, Chateau des Moines, or Chef Boyardeaux.

Do Sweetbreads Taste Like Coffee Cake?

Great names make for great business. There are not a lot of new fish swimming around or new vegetables being grown. Over the years there are a lot of renamed foods that have “reinvented” themselves (think “heirloom vegetables”) to fit the chic desires of the time. Just look at the menu at the next wedding dinner you attend. If you had a choice, which would you choose, Menu A or B?

Menu A.

Fish Eggs
Chinese gooseberry
Buttery Snails
Bramble
Beef kidneys
Chinese Moon Fruit
Duck Liver
Mutton Fish
Squid

Menu B.

Caviar
Kiwi fruit
Escargot
Blackberries
Sweetbreads
Pamella
Fois Grois
Abalone
Calimari

Even though A and B are the exact same foods, most of us would choose Menu B, or simply drop off our wedding gift and skip the dinner. In a restaurant, we’d also be willing to pay a lot more to eat off Menu B.

What a difference a name makes. Something similar happened in the 1940s. At the time, the biggest threat to American nutrition was a war – and the name of a food.

During World War II, much of America’s domestic meat was being shipped overseas to feed soldiers and allies. As a result, there was a growing concern that a lengthy war would leave the United States protein-starved. The potential solution to this problem lay in what were then called organ meats: Hearts, kidneys, liver, brains, stomachs, intestines,

and even the feet, ears, and heads of cows, hogs, sheep, and chickens.¹⁵ The challenge was how to encourage Depression-era Americans to incorporate these into their diet. To do this, the Department of Defense recruited Margaret Mead, Kurt Lewin, and dozens of the brightest, and subsequently most famous, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, food scientists, dieticians, and home economists in the nation. Their task: to make families rush to the dinner table for liverloaf and kidney pie.

One of their first discoveries was that the term “organ meats” would never cause any stampedes at the meat counter. It didn’t stimulate appetites, but it did stimulate imagination – in the wrong direction. Even labeling the meat case with signs saying Succulent Italian Brain Filet or Traditional Cajun Tongue and Beans was not going to be the solution.

The first step of the nutrition braintrust was to come up with the name “variety meats.” Besides being less visual and more vague, it also connoted that these were meats that could be rotated into one’s menu for variety and not for eternity.¹⁶ They could be used to bring variety to the meal. The names were changed in butcher shops, in cookbooks, and in government promotions. Sales increased and tastes slowly changed until the post-war boom in prosperity brought the choice cuts back on the table.

History repeats itself. Yesterday it was organ meats, today it is soy.

People in the soy foods industry appear mystified why many people will not eat soy foods unless forced to for health reasons. Granted, a good deal has been done to improve the taste of soy, but a lot of residual negative feelings still exist. Given the power of expectations, this is a real problem.

The National Soybean Research Center came to the Food and Brand Lab to determine why people think soy tastes so bad.¹⁷ A series of focus groups of people over the age of forty revealed they generally had bad perceptions about the taste, aftertaste, and texture of soy foods. Some of these were due to earlier experiences with the off-taste soy filler that was used in the school hot lunch program in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸

Still other perceptions were based on non-soy-related events. A number of people mentioned that whenever they heard the word soy, they thought of a 1971 Charleton Heston movie – the guilty-pleasure classic called *Soylent Green*. In this futuristic world, the only food source is a mysterious green substance called Soylent Green. In the closing moments of the movie, Charleton Heston discovers that the source of Soylent Green is reconstituted humans. He stretches his arms skyward, falls to his knees, and bellows, “Soylent Green is Peeeeoople.”

Despite recent improvements in the taste and texture, expectation assimilation would lead us to predict that if people expect a food with soy to taste bad, it will taste bad. But what if that food has no soy in it to begin with? If people simply believe that an ingredient is in a food, will that mindlessly influence their taste of it.

The Phantom Ingredient Studies were conducted in Iowa and Illinois, the two states which are the largest growers of soybeans in the United States. For these studies, the wrappers of 150 Powerbars were modified to say either “Contains 10 grams of protein” or “Contains 10 grams of *soy* protein.” The only difference between the two labels was one prominent, three-letter word, soy. In reality, there was no soy protein in this Powerbar. Exactly zero. It was a Phantom Ingredient. If after eating one of these

Powerbars people believed they tasted soy, they would only be mindlessly responding to the power of suggestion.

During a break in a series of Parent Teacher Association meetings, Iowa and Illinois parents were given the bars (which were introduced as a new product) and asked to take a look at the package, and then to try them. The people who ate the bars that said only “Contains 10 grams of protein” described the bars favorably: They said they were chocolaty, chewy, and tasty. The other people, the ones who had been given the bars saying they had 10 grams of soy protein were not so positive.¹⁹ Many spit out the bar, or excused themselves to get a drink of water. One person passed a piece of gum to his wife so that both could get the taste out of their mouth. When asked what they thought, they claimed that the bars had a bad aftertaste, were chalky, and did not even taste like chocolate.^{20 21}

This was not good news to our soy friends. Attitudes are improving and there is good precedent to think it will just take more time and more innovation.

Thirty years ago, almost none of us would have eaten something called an “Unflavored bioactive dairy-based culture.” But if we stirred in some fruit, sugar, flavoring, innovation, and marketing, our tastes would change. In fact, a Silky Lemon Yogurt sounds pretty good right now.

Re-engineering Strategy #6: Create Expectations That Make You a Better Cook.

Regardless whether the lemon Jell-O is cherry-colored, the fish-of-the-day is named “Succulent Italian seafood filet,” or the Night Train Express has a \$9.99 price tag,

we taste what we expect we'll taste. This is good news for those of us who barely know the recipe for toast.

• **Tell them what's for dinner.** Suppose you are asked, "What's for dinner?" *Any* two words you say will make you a better cook as long as they are positive and descriptive. Simply adding words like traditional, Cajun, Succulent, and homemade caused people in our restaurant to think the food tasted better and that the cook was European-trained. Big dinner party planned? The two-word technique will probably be the biggest 5-minute fix to your cooking ability that you can make. What words should you use? Download a couple restaurant menus while your oven is preheating.

• **Fix the atmosphere when you fix the food.** Spending your last 15 minutes of prep on atmospheric details will probably give you more bang than if you spent them on the food. Think soft – soft lights, soft music, soft candles. Think nice -- nice plates, nice table cloth, nice glasses. A nice atmosphere creates positive expectations and these expectations become a reality. Even pizza tastes better by candlelight. Just remember to take it out of the box before you put it in the oven.

Chapter 6 Endnotes

(For back of the book)

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- ¹ Scientifically speaking, our taste is objective, but our interpretation of what we taste is subjective. We can't trick our tastebuds, but we can trick what we *think* our tastebuds taste.
- ² Heli M. Tuorila, Herbert L. Meiselman, Armand V. Cardello, and Larry L. Leshner, "Effect of Expectations and the Definition of Product Category on Acceptance of Unfamiliar Foods," *Food Quality and Preference* (1998), vol. 9, no. 6, pp. 421-430.
- ³ What is unclear in this particular study was whether the results are due to the experimental effect or to demand effects. Further work is being done to determine this. The working paper is: Brian Wansink and Alan Wright, 2005 "Sensory Suggestiveness and Evaluation," Working paper, U.S. Army Labs, Natick, MA.
- ⁴ In 2001, the Lab did a large-scale quantitative survey on how World War II influenced food habits of Americans who were involved in the war. Billy was one of the veterans who completed the survey, and he included this handwritten story. More on our WWII study can be found in Chapter 8. Discomforting Comfort foods.
- ⁵ Millions are spent each year on fine china on any given wedding Saturday in June. More still is spent by not-so-newlyweds upgrading everyday kitchen plates and dishes. Yet if people really "know what they like and do not like," then the plate on which a brownie is served should have no bearing on how they evaluate the taste.
- ⁶ Nothing gives a better appreciation of the theatre that occurs in the kitchen of a world-class restaurant than Anthony Bourdain's irreverent classic, *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, (New York: The Ecco Press, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2000).
- ⁷ Brian Wansink, Koert van Ittersum, and James E. Painter, "How Descriptive Food Names Bias Sensory Perceptions in Restaurants," *Food Quality and Preference* (2004), forthcoming.
- ⁸ Brian Wansink, James M. Painter, and Koert van Ittersum, "Descriptive Menu Labels' Effect on Sales," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly* (December 2001), vol. 42, no. 6, pp. 68-72.
- ⁹ These are the February 13, 2006 menus downloaded from the websites of the two schools. In addition to the items listed for Phillips Exeter Academy, their menu also had grilled chicken breast, cole slaw, and gingerbread with topping. In 1996 the Latin inscription over the main entrance to the Academy Building was changed to a more gender inclusive version "*hic quaerite pueri puellae-que virtutem et scientiam.*"
- ¹⁰ Brian Wansink, Koert van Ittersum, and James E. painter, "How Descriptive Food Names Bias Sensory Perceptions in Restaurants," *Food Quality and Preference* (2005), vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 393-400.

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- ¹¹ This is common from the most expensive to the least expensive. I think the most genuine genius in a name award should belong to McDonald's "Happy Meals." That pretty much summarizes the main thing children want from their food.
- ¹² Thanks to Bethany Carson for going menu quest and her content analysis of the descriptive words in these menus. These themes can be found in a sidebar on page 70 of the following article: Brian Wansink, James M. Painter, and Koert van Ittersum, "Descriptive Menu Labels' Effect on Sales," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly* (December 2001), vol. 42, no. 6, pp. 68-72.
- ¹³ Graham Lawton, "Angelic Host," *New Scientist* (December 2004), vol. 184, pp. 68-69.
- ¹⁴ Ralph I. Allison and Kenneth P. Uhl, "Influence of Beer Brand Identification on Taste Perception," *Journal of Marketing Research* (August 1964), vol. 1, pp. 36-39
- ¹⁵ An alternative to organ meats was game meat. The most provocative culinary source on game is Ted and Shemane Nugent's aptly titled book, *Kill It & Grill It: A Guide to Preparing and Cooking Wild Game and Fish*, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2002). Rock on.
- ¹⁶ Brian Wansink, "Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front: Lost Lessons from World War II Research," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* (Spring 2002), vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 90-99.
- ¹⁷ While the National Soybean Research Center initiated these early projects with soy, financial support for these studies also came from the Council for Agricultural Research, the Illinois Soybean Program Operating Board, and the Illinois Center for Soy Foods.
- ¹⁸ Another unfortunate association with soy has to do with its pronunciation. In Russian, the word SOY, referred to an acronym for a common nuclear bomb system. Although Americans wouldn't know this, it certainly would not help their perceptions of its taste. The best overview of these studies is: Brian Wansink, *Marketing Nutrition: Soy, Functional Foods, Biotechnology, and Obesity*, (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Brian Wansink and Randall Westgren, "Profiling Taste-Motivated Segments," *Appetite* (December 2003), vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 323-327. Brian Wansink, "Overcoming the Taste Stigma of Soy," *Journal of Food Science* (September 2003), vol. 68, no. 8, pp. 2604-2606.
- ¹⁹ This did not happen with everyone, however. People who had classified themselves as being very health conscious were uninfluenced by the soy label. That is, having soy on the product did not hurt their evaluation, but it also did not help it any. It simply had no effect. More can be found in Brian Wansink and Se-Bum Park, "Sensory Suggestiveness and Labeling: Do Soy Labels Bias Taste?" *Journal of Sensory Studies* (November 2002), vol. 17, no. 5, pp. 483-491.
- ²⁰ This did not happen with everyone, however. People who had classified themselves as being very health conscious were uninfluenced by the soy label. That is, having soy on the product did not hurt their evaluation, but it also did not help it any. It simply had no effect.
- ²¹ Rajagopal Raghunathan, Rebecca E. Walker, and Wayne D. Hoyer, *The 'Unhealthy = Tasty' Intuition and its Effects on Taste Inferences, Enjoyment, and Choice of Food Products* (University of Texas at Austin: working paper, 2005).