



# KARMA KITCHEN

Growing in Generosity

## Exploring KK in Your Neighborhood

### **Karma Kitchen's Core principles**

- Stay volunteer run, don't ask, focus on small
- Karma Kitchen does not do fund raising
- Mindset is: what are our gifts and how do we share them?
- Runs on the volition of volunteers with the aspiration of "being the change"
- There are other variations of pay-it-forward restaurants that operate within different frameworks (some offer free meals, others are in the spirit of pay-as-you-wish, or fundraising dinners for a good cause etc)
- Our partnerships with other chapters of Karma Kitchen have been based on resonance at the level of these core principles
- Core concepts document: [http://www.charityfocus.org/proj\\_upload/1874/core\\_concepts.pdf](http://www.charityfocus.org/proj_upload/1874/core_concepts.pdf)

### **Framework & Basic Logistics**

- May be helpful to think of this experiment as a "pilot" project and determine a pilot period at the onset. (KK Berkeley and DC decided on three months when they started)
- At the end of the pilot the core team can evaluate their own commitment, the community response, the project's sustainability, the partnership with the restaurant etc.
- Important to remain in a space of demand pull (there is a felt need and an appreciation for a space like this in the community) and not a supply push (we created this space so now we have to get people to "buy" into it)
- Important to remain real to your environment
- We make an effort to ensure that Karma Kitchen doesn't operate under artificial pressure to keep going just for the sake of staying "in business" (Here in Berkeley we have opened, closed, and reopened Karma Kitchen three separate times in the process of staying real to the intention of the experiment)
- End of the pilot period might also be a good time to deepen commitment with the restaurant owner to continue to grow together
- The way it works in Berkeley and DC – since we didn't want the restaurant to bear the entire financial cost of running KK we decided on a weekly amount with the restaurant owners that covers their costs for hosting Karma Kitchen in their space (rent, salary – in our case we retain two chefs, food

procurement etc. Opening night in Berkeley was covered for by contributions pooled among the volunteers. Subsequent weeks were covered for by guest contributions from the previous week. In the case of both Berkeley and DC this has proved to be a self-sustaining model)

- We periodically reassess the amount being given to the restaurant to ensure that if our guest volume and contribution amount is steadily increasing, that we adjust the weekly rate for the restaurant accordingly.

### **Finding A Partner Restaurant**

- Location: Helps to be located in a central place that is easy both for volunteers to get to as well as guests
- Helps if there is foot traffic in the area so you increase the chance of passersby dropping in
- Seating capacity: If it's a very large place you want to consider how to use the space effectively so that it doesn't seem deserted in the beginning when you are still building up momentum
- Is helpful to look for financially healthy restaurants to partner with – if the restaurant is struggling they may begin to depend on Karma Kitchen “revenue” which creates an unhealthy dynamic all around
- Restaurant should not be a hard sell because that changes the dynamic – ie rather than “pitching” Karma Kitchen at them it's helpful to think of it as sharing the concept and exploring the level of resonance. If the resonance isn't there then it's probably not the best place to go with.
- A resonance in values is key – of course you want to take into consideration that a restaurant is running a business and as such has certain responsibilities and concerns that you want to address for the owner but before going to deeply into a discussion about finances etc you want to assess what their level of resonance is with the underlying spirit of KK and whether it's something they would be excited to be a part of.

### **Volunteers**

- It is important to have a set of core volunteers on which the effort can rely – especially in the beginning, there has to be a group of people willing to Show Up to get done what needs to get done on a weekly basis.
- If you're setting up a system such that it depends very heavily on one person (for instance one volunteer chef who will train people each week how to prepare the food) you want to ensure that that person is fully committed, at least for the length of the pilot
- One thing we didn't discuss on the phone: Legality re volunteer participation needs to be sorted out (different States have different regulations regarding food preparation in commercial kitchens etc), and it's good to have a policy that all volunteers sign waivers.
- We had a core team of about a dozen volunteers when we started in Berkeley (DC had 6 core volunteers) and for the first month we did not open up volunteering opportunities to anyone outside of the core team. This gave us an opportunity to standardize processes and work out and kinks in the flow etc.
- After opening up opportunities to the general public we still took care to maintain a balance between old and new volunteers. Currently for a crew of 10 volunteers we aim for at least 4 “old” volunteers.

## Food

- To achieve consistency in the food quality and availability, when the rest of the volunteer crew is dynamic, it can be helpful to have food preparation taken care of by the regular restaurant chef (this is how we've chosen to do it in Berkeley and DC)
- A good compromise in these locations between cooking the complete meal and letting the restaurant chef prepare has been to have gourmet salads and desserts and drinks made by volunteers and the entrees by the restaurant chef
- Consideration should be given to simplifying the menu to a few iterations which can be repeated every 3-4 weeks
- If you are choosing to have volunteers prepare food at the restaurant it might be worth looking at the possibility of piggybacking off the host restaurant's existing procurement channel to reduce volunteer overhead on that front.
- We have simplified the ordering process in Berkeley and DC by asking guests to "order by exclusion" which basically means unless they prefer something on the menu to be excluded they will be served everything on the menu ☹ (this also helps give the guest an experience of abundance)
- Everything served at KK is made available in seconds and thirds (we don't explicitly ask about seconds for drinks and desserts which tend to be available in more limited quantities than the main meal, but we do serve them on request)

## Operation

- It is important that you can afford to start small – we made a conscious choice to operate on Sunday afternoon both in Berkeley and DC because a Saturday night slot for instance would have meant we were taking the "prime" revenue night of the restaurant- which would have placed a heavier burden on us to pull in that amount for them. Sunday was a low traffic slot – so in that sense was low risk on both sides (and allowed us a chance to ramp up our guest traffic organically over time)
- Challenges to financial sustainability : freeloaders ☹ (In Berkeley a lot of people were concerned about homeless people coming into KK and that students would take advantage of it. Both can become a serious problem unless you're conscious of it from the get go. We have a certain percentage of people who come in with that mentality of "getting a free meal" – part of the process is to give them that experience of unconditional generosity in a skilful way, over time their cup overflows perhaps and they are moved to pay it forward, we've certainly seen this happen. But you do want to make sure that you are building positive momentum in a way that counterbalances the freeloaders and keeps their percentage contained.

## Learning from ongoing discussions with Chicago Karma kitchen aspirants

There's a team of about a dozen folks in Chicago who have been pumped up about starting a Karma Kitchen in their area. Part of their challenge has been finding a willing and suitable restaurant partner.

- In the interim period between the intention to start KK and finding a restaurant it's helpful to step back and consider the fundamental idea behind KK. Our tagline is: "Growing in Generosity." You don't need a restaurant to do that ☺
- We've had folks experiment with bringing Karma Kitchen into people's homes (volunteers cook a meal and "tag" someone with it as kind of an ambush of appreciation!) or set up lemonade stands in Central park or distribute Cupcakes in London ☺ We've had groups experiment with Karma Kitchen on the streets where volunteers assemble brown bag lunches and split up in small groups to offer them on the streets to people they might not otherwise have stopped to connect with (the meal offering becomes an excuse for practicing the simple act of generosity, an excuse for taking the time to listen and be present with people in the community – the Chicago team did an event along these lines that was really helpful in deepening their understanding of what KK is about at its core.