

INTRODUCTION

I'M MAKING YOU FAT

I control what you eat, I control how much of it and how often. I dictate how your doctor advises you, as well as what your dietitian and personal trainer recommend to you. I plant the health articles you read in your newspaper, and the messages you hear when you watch the news or your favorite daytime doctor personality.

I'm even manipulating the ingredients in that healthy meal you bought at your gym and the label you read to make sure it is good for you; after all, everything you know about reading food labels, I taught you. Everything you *think* you know about nutrition and weight loss comes from me.

My name is Jeff Scot Philips. I'm the founder and CEO of a health-food manufacturer that prepares meals for national gym franchises, medical weight loss facilities, grocery stores, and fitness celebrities all across the United States. In fact, if you've ever eaten a healthy prepackaged meal (think Lean Cuisine, but tastier) you might have eaten my food and not known it.

You would be horrified if you knew all the ways I can manipulate my ingredients and food labels. For example, did you know that

according to the United States Department of Agriculture, salmon isn't a lean, healthy food because of its high fat content? So guess what companies like mine do to get around this: we add refined sugars, usually in the form of pastas and bread, to increase the total calories while keeping the grams of fat the same, which legally makes salmon a lean, healthy meal.

And if you think that's deceptive and irresponsible, you probably won't want to read the next sentence.

When our food labels say "No HFCS (high-fructose corn-syrup)," that doesn't mean there's no HFCS (*wink*). Once we've added sugar to make our seafood healthy, the USDA doesn't care what we do with it next—we don't even have to mention any of the ingredients! We can take a crab cake and pump it full of gluten and HFCS, and we don't have to mention either one on the nutrition label. Could people with allergies to gluten get sick? You bet! But these ingredients are very cheap for us, and if you, the health-conscious consumer, don't know that they're in there you'll buy more, and we'll profit more!

As a food manufacturer I'm totally out of control, I don't answer to anyone, and I manipulate whatever I have to, to sell product. But even *that* isn't the truly scary part. This is:

I'm the one educating you on health.

The reason baby boomers think egg yolks are high in cholesterol and lead to increased chances of heart attack is thanks to John Harvey Kellogg, founder of Kellogg's Corn Flakes, who claimed that in an ad campaign. If you've ever heard that chocolate has health benefits, that's because the Mars, Incorporated (Snickers, M&M's, Twix, Milky Way) funded the research on it. Did you know that calories were created—not discovered—by two guys named Merrill and Watt in 1955? And when Elisabeth Hasselbeck sparked the gluten paranoia in 2009, she empowered food companies like mine to slap a gluten-free label on chips and cookies that people started buying more than ever, which lead to a rapid increase of obesity in America.

I pay big-name fitness celebrities to endorse my food, I publically

intimidate politicians to push my competitors out, I travel the country sleeping with personal trainers so that they'll promote my meals, and when my on-site USDA agent wouldn't approve my questionable nutrition labels I had to bribe him, though not with money; I did it by bringing a Miss America contestant friend of mine to spend the afternoon with him. My labels got approved the next day.

Business is good. But the kicker is: all of this corporate corruption, ingredient deviancy, and food label fraud keeps me up at night. I don't want to do this to people's food. I'm not happy about making people fatter and lying to their face about it.

But, as you'll see, I can't stop either.

PROLOGUE

BRIBING THE HEALTH INSPECTOR

My head was in the back of a hot, dust-filled commercial oven, and there was a man tugging on my shirt and screaming at me at the top of his lungs. My eyes were watering so bad I could barely see, and every time I tried to breathe, my lungs filled with soot and I started coughing violently. The oven had just finished auto-cleaning and I was scraping out the burned ashes to make it look brand-new.

The man yelling at me was the owner of the kitchen space I was renting—we'll call him Christopher—and he had a lot of money to lose if we failed the inspection, so he kept screaming, "Hurry the fuck up! Come on. Come on. Come on!" Every thirty seconds, he stopped shouting at me only long enough to direct the chefs, who were running in and out of the room with their arms full of kitchen equipment. They were transporting all of our abused cooking utensils across the hall to be locked in the office and then replaced with our "display utensils," the equipment we never used (health code violation 3.2-5110). We were down to twenty minutes before the health inspector

would arrive, which meant we had fifteen minutes to get the place looking like a showroom kitchen and to get the hell out of there.

I was a virgin in the food service industry. I hadn't worked in a real kitchen before; I hadn't even done any research before starting my healthy meal delivery company. I had no clue what the health codes were, other than the common sense ones, like always washing my hands and keeping food off the floor. Christopher, however, owned numerous properties, so he knew that we were in violation of various health code laws, and if he wanted to keep us as tenants, we had to cover up those violations to avoid getting shut down.

I guess I should have known that everyone handling food was required to be trained in food safety, which they weren't (health code violation 5-421-70 [12]), or that the staff needed an operational bathroom, which they didn't have (health code violation 5-421-2240), or that we were supposed to have three side-by-side sinks—one for washing, one for rinsing, and one for sanitizing (health code violation 3.2-5106). Had I done my research, I would have known that we were required to have an industrial strength dishwasher, properly elevated food storage units, and grease traps for the sinks—none of which we had (health code violations . . . well, you get the idea). Rather than correcting all these things at the last minute, Christopher thought it would be easier—i.e., cheaper—to make it look as if the space wasn't being used as a commercial kitchen at all, which would change the rules that applied to us. And, thanks to the health department, it was very easy for us to do this.

Health inspectors schedule their visits weeks in advance (which is nowhere near as lazy as the USDA's approach, which is to review detailed reports of our operations—that *we* create!). Even better for us, they actually let the kitchen owner choose the time and date of the appointment, which gave us plenty of time to create a pristine kitchen. So my crew and I spent the forty-eight hours leading up to the inspection scrubbing countertops, painting the walls, bleaching the refrigerators, Krud-Kutting the mountains of soot caked at the bottom of the ovens, steaming the floors, pouring gallons of grease

into emptied plastic containers to be tossed into our neighbor's trash can, and hiding all the equipment we actually used to prepare food.

Not only were we breaking just about every health code there was, but we were also going to blatantly lie about it to the inspector. But under the pressure of the moment, all I knew was that I didn't want to lose my newly formed company, so I just kept my mouth shut and followed Christopher's lead.

With thirty seconds to spare, we had the kitchen looking like the set of a daytime cooking show, and as I heard the inspector walking up the stairs to the kitchen door, I yanked the chefs into the crowded office with me and pulled the door shut, locking us in.

There was no question that the health inspector would give us a passing grade now. On a typical day, you'd see people scrambling all over the place, handling food nonstop from five a.m. to nine p.m. Although we were averaging twelve hundred meals per day, there were no traces of food in any of the five refrigerators; the ovens and stove tops looked as though they'd never been turned on; you could see your reflection on the sparkling pots and pans that were sitting on top of the Windex-coated countertops; and, most convincing of all, there were zero cooks in sight.

I was standing wedged between our kitchen equipment and the chefs with my ear to the door, listening as Christopher lied his way through the inspection. "Oh, those? We just use those for, uh, our cooking classes." . . . "No, we don't charge for the food itself, only for the education." . . . "Of course! I plan to have the bathroom fully functional by the end of the week." . . . "Well no, *I* don't handle the food." . . . "The guy who's renting the space? He couldn't be here today." . . . "No problem, whatever we need to do." . . . "OK, how much?"

After fifteen or twenty minutes of Christopher's smoke blowing, I heard the kitchen door slam, followed by silence. I waited a few extra minutes, then opened the door and peeked out. On the counter sat a certificate noting that we had passed our inspection. Beside the certificate was an informal invoice from Christopher for five-hundred bucks with a small handwritten note at the bottom: "Your half."

A couple of hours later, it was dark out and the chefs had all gone home for the night. I was wheeling the last tray rack from the office back into the kitchen, when I heard what sounded like a faint knock at the door.

Tap-tap-tap.

I stopped moving.

Tap-tap-tap.

I tried swallowing the golf ball in my throat. I grabbed Christopher's invoice off the table, crumpled the evidence, and threw it into the trash.

Tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap.

I opened the door to see this gorgeous middle-aged woman in a business suit eyeballing me.

I swung the door all the way out, making enough room for her to step through.

"Hi, what can I do for you?" I asked.

After giving the kitchen a brief once-over, then turning back to me, she said, "I'm guessing you're Jeff."

I hesitated, wondering how she knew my name. "Yeah, I'm Jeff. Is there something I can help you with?"

"I understand your kitchen had a health inspection today."

"Yes, it did. We passed with flying colors," I pointed behind her. "The certificate's right over there on the wall."

Without bothering to look, she continued, "I have a few questions for you. Let's speak in your office." She signaled for me to lead the way.

She locked the door behind her, rejected the chair I offered, and asked, "How long have you been in business?"

I shrugged, "Just a couple of months."

"And I understand Christopher is the one who met with your health inspector, not you."

"Yeah," I confirmed, "it's his property. I'm just renting the space, ya know."

"But you own the company that employs the people who handle the food, correct?"

Wondering whether I was trapping myself, I tried playing innocent, “Yeah, that’s right. Was I supposed to meet with the inspector too?”

Then she threw a complete curveball: “Have you ever eaten at [hidden name], the little mom-and-pop Italian restaurant around the corner?”

Bewildered, I affirmed, “Uh, sure, plenty of times.”

“Do you like the food?”

“Yeah, the food’s good but—look, I’m sorry for being blunt, but what are you getting at? Did something go wrong with our inspection today?”

“I’m glad you prefer bluntness, because that place hasn’t come close to passing inspection on its best day, and it would have been shut down years ago if the owner hadn’t worked out a deal with me.”

“OK. What kind of deal? Who are you?”

She finally broke her stern demeanor with a tiny smile, “The owner of that place is more concerned about who my husband is, because he knows if my husband were to find out how he runs his restaurant, it wouldn’t be open the next morning—which is why he worked out a deal with me. The deal is that I’ll keep my husband away from his kitchen. Would you like me to keep my husband away from your kitchen too?”

Finally grasping the big picture, I pressed back, “That’s interesting, but I don’t know who your husband is, and, like I said, we passed our inspection, so there’s nothing to make a deal about.”

She stepped right up to me, bringing her face only a few inches away from mine, “What if my husband were to show up tomorrow or the next day while your employees are in here, cooking; will it still be up to code then?”

Her smile faded away when I said, “Look, I don’t know who your husband works for, but Christopher already took care of our health inspector, so he may want to check—”

Without warning, she smacked her hand into my crotch, sending a shockwave up through my stomach, then clamped down with her

fingers and repeated her offer, “You’re running a commercial food business out of a *non*commercial kitchen.” She spouted off a quick list of code violations, “no repackaged container labels: 5-421-480; improper utensil storage: 5-421-550 produce sitting next to packaged meals: 5-421-470 . . . Now, do you want me to keep my husband away from your kitchen or not?”

I coughed out a response, “Ehhh, OK.” I gripped her forearm, but it only made her squeeze harder.

Calmly, she asked again, “So you want to work out a deal, then?”

“Fine—that’s fine. Wha-whatever w-we need to, eh, to do!”

She cracked her little smile again, “Good,” then loosened her grip.

Defeated, I asked, “So, do I need to work out a regular payment to you . . . or how does this work?”

“That’s right.” Her clamping turned to fondling. “Once a month, right here.”

“Working out a deal with me isn’t so bad,” she assured me, as I started to get hard. Then she locked my hair between her fingers, pulled me in toward her. I was a little gray on which one of us was breaking what law, but at that moment, I didn’t really give a shit.

When she left twenty minutes later, I still had no idea of who the hell she or her husband were, but I knew I had just been hazed into something I didn’t know how to get out of. I dubbed her the Extortion Cougar.

This was the beginning of my journey into the food and weight-loss industry and when I first learned about the corruption, manipulation, and bribes. If someone had told me that in three years the company I would start in my little condo kitchen would be producing and shipping food for other health companies all across the country, or that I would be working with fitness gurus, investors, government agencies, and the media to push shitty food on unsuspecting American consumers, I would have said, “You’re fucking crazy.” But this was about to become my new world.