

Career profile

Name: Iqbal Wahhab, OBE

Job title: Restaurateur and Businessman



Write your own meal ticket.



Iqbal Wahhab, OBE is a British Bangladeshi restaurateur and businessman committed to working with young people. He is founder of the award-winning Cinnamon Club and ROAST.

Before entering hospitality, Iqbal had a distinguished career as a journalist writing for the national press, set up his own PR Company specialising in food, drinks and restaurants, and launched Tandoori Magazine.

What do you enjoy the most about your job, what do you find most exciting?

I enjoy the varied nature of what I do - from mixing the running and growing of my business interests through to working on government and charitable projects, mentoring people from difficult backgrounds, as well as going to so many restaurants and seeing tangible results from what I do.

How did you begin your career in hospitality?

A decade ago, I launched The Cinnamon Club. Before that I ran several media companies.

What's your best career moment?

My best moment was overcoming the myriad of problems and challenges I faced in opening The Cinnamon Club, as documented by the BBC series Trouble at The Top.

If you could go back in time would you choose a different career?

No – I don't think the way I conduct my life constitutes a career.

What's your dream job?

The one I have.

Who is your idol?

In restaurants, it has to be Danny Meyer, America's legend behind Union Square Cafe, Gramercy Tavern and my favourite Blue Smoke in Manhattan. In business, Lord Noon has taught me that you can be a great businessman and a gentleman too.

What's your favourite food?

I have an unhealthy obsession with chicken wings and cheeseburgers.

What's the weirdest thing you have ever eaten?

There used to be a restaurant called Empire where I had zebra carpaccio followed by cobra risotto and then chocolate covered scorpions. Strangely, the place didn't last long.

What did you want to do when you were in school?

Everything that was bad.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself

I started my first business aged 11 – a South London gang where we did dodgy stuff very lucratively.

What's the secret to success?

Having a good team that delivers your vision.

What advice would you give to other people who want to work in hospitality?

Be prepared to work harder than you have ever worked before!

Has the immigration cap affected your restaurants and how do you cope with it?

No, we work hard building the skills and talent of the people we have. We just have to live with the fact that there are too many people out of work here to justify bringing people in from overseas.

Further information

For further information on career opportunities in hospitality visit www.hospitalityguild.co.uk