



HOW BUILDING A COMMUNITY CHANGED MY DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

By **Sheela Rodrigues**

When people hear that I'm the co-founder of Platesfull, they often assume I woke up one day with a brilliant business idea.

The truth is much simpler.

It started in my kitchen.

I've always loved cooking. Long before Platesfull, I was the person who volunteered to host family gatherings and dinner parties. There is something special about seeing people gather around a table, sharing stories over good food. For me, cooking has never been just about recipes. It's my way of bringing people together.

But every time we hosted, I noticed the same pattern.

The celebration started days before our guests arrived. Planning the menu. Grocery shopping. Cleaning the house. Preparing dishes. Setting the table. Then came serving everyone while making sure drinks were topped up and everyone was comfortable. By the time we finally sat down, I was already exhausted.

When the evening ended, everyone went home with wonderful memories. We were left with a sink full of dishes and a kitchen that needed another few hours of attention.

One evening, my husband Sharon and I looked at each other and asked a simple question:

"Why can't hosting be as enjoyable for the host as it is for the guests?"

We started searching for private chefs, but finding someone trustworthy wasn't easy. Every chef had a different process, pricing wasn't always transparent, and there wasn't one place where you could confidently compare options.

At the same time, we began talking to chefs.

What surprised us was that they were facing their own challenges. Many incredibly talented chefs spent years perfecting their craft but struggled to find customers consistently. They wanted to cook—not spend hours marketing themselves, chasing leads, or managing bookings.

That's when we realized we weren't just solving one problem.

We were connecting two groups of people who genuinely needed each other.

That realization became Platesfull.

Today, our community includes private chefs, bartenders, party helpers, planners, entertainers, and families looking to celebrate life's special moments at home. Every booking is more than just a transaction. It's someone trusting another person to be part of an important memory.

One lesson I've learned along the way is that communities aren't built by technology alone.

Technology helps people find each other, but trust is what builds lasting relationships. Every conversation with a chef, every customer review, and even every piece of constructive criticism has helped us become a better platform.

As our business has grown, AI has also become an incredible tool for us. It helps chefs create menus more efficiently, allows customers to find the right chef faster, and enables our small team to build features that would have taken months just a few years ago.

But the heart of our business hasn't changed.

People don't remember the technology behind a booking. They remember celebrating an anniversary without worrying about cooking. They remember a birthday dinner where everyone could simply enjoy the evening together. They remember the conversations, the laughter, and the memories created around the table.

For me, success isn't measured only by revenue or growth.

It's measured by the community we're building—one where talented hospitality professionals have more opportunities to do what they love, and where families can spend less time worrying about hosting and more time creating memories together.

Looking back, I don't think we built Platesfull because we wanted to create another startup.

We built it because we believed that every celebration deserves someone who gets to enjoy it—including the host.

Connect With Sheela

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