

D'estratega de màrqueting a cuinera.

*Siiri Sampson
innovation history*

Com obrir-te nous camins i innovar en totes les indústries.

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Qui és Siiri Sampson?

Siiri Sampson is a Seattle, Washington native who enjoyed learning two very different styles of cooking growing up. Her mom's family has a Southern background, lending a down-home, comfort food style to her classic, generations-old family dishes. Her dad always favored experimenting in the kitchen, and his flair for whipping up the unknown sparked Siiri's curiosities as a young cook.

After years of living and eating in the Emerald City, Siiri moved on from her marketing strategy career to dive into a self-guided, DIY culinary school. Under the mentorship of celebrated chefs, she spent several months in some of the best kitchens in Seattle before buying a one-way ticket to Spain for a deep cultural immersion. Siiri is eager to learn from the chefs, farmers, butchers and wine makers that infuse Spain with its rich and vibrant tradition, and who lead the charge in the current progressive food scene. Ultimately, her focus is food fundamental education of the mechanics of ingredients, efficient techniques and "instinct cooking" based on ratios and common sense. A cook in training, she is always learning, sharing what she knows, and adding to her ever-growing list of unanswered questions.

What it boils down to, for Siiri, is helping others feel empowered in the kitchen, without spend more time, money or energy than necessary.



The Siiri Sampson innovation history

Hi ha un moment en què descobreixes que vols canviar? O és la suma de diversos moments? Per què et vas plantejar el canvi? Quin va ser el procés o detonant per arribar a la conclusió que necessitaves un canvi? És a dir: cansament del que estaves fent, necessitat de fer una altra cosa, estrès, conèixer a algú...

Yes, there was a specific moment when I discovered that I wanted or needed to change my career. I had been talking with a friend who had recently changed careers (also into the food industry) and one night i was getting ready to leave for a cook book release party. I was putting my make up on and thought to myself, "gosh, some day it would be great to ----" and the voice in my mind said, "STOP! ENOUGH! I am so tired of hearing you talk about what COULD happen some day. This is exhausting. Either do it or stop thinking about it. But no more 'somedays'. You have one year to figure out what you want to do with food full time as the next phase in your career, and if you can't make it happen in one year, let it go and focus on what's next." I had to make this change because I was compelled to follow my true passion. I know my true purpose at this time in my life is to attempt to influence change in food education for the mass public of my country. It is a long road, but I see what is broken or missing in our system and I can't ignore it. My objective is to impact the direction of change, or to start a wave of paradigm shift that will have long lasting impact on the general public that cook eat at home.

I planned the transition from one industry to another over the course of a year, which I'll discuss in a minute. The actual transition was done over the course of six months. When I knew it was time to step into the next phase of my career, which was cooking full time and beginning to pursue food education, I took a year to research, investigate and search for numerous answers: what kinds of jobs exist in the cooking side of the food industry that I would be interested in, what types of companies or departments exist that are appealing to me, what am I capable of and what do I need to learn, what are the best methods or schools I can learn from and how, etcetera. The most important questions I had to answer, however, were the following:

1. What do I want my eventual legacy to be, and how do I set out on the right path for my life as of today?
2. What do I want?

The second question is actually the most important and

I have learned it is the question you must continually ask yourself, as the answer is constantly changing.

The process of preparing for the six month transition was, for me, a large but methodical process. Since my job for the past 9 years had been in strategy and project management, it was easy for me to set up the end goal objective or question and then identify both the milestones I needed to achieve finding the answer, as well as the tasks and timelines that would ensure I reached it within my self-imposed timeline.

One of my ongoing tasks or processes was to conduct informational interviews with chefs, restaurantuers, cooks that worked for other chefs, freelancers and private chefs, and small business owners as well as my teachers and mentors across all industries. I standardized the questions I asked them to give me enough data points to build a strong case for the top one or two paths I was the most interested in following.

As time went on and more milestones were completed, I realized I did not want to attend culinary school (because of my own discipline, study methodologies and other access to resources like interning or “Staging/stagiaire” with chefs I knew. Additionally, the industry has changed drastically in recent years and culinary school would not necessarily be the most beneficial path for my needs, work ethic or personality type). For me the best path was to intern with chefs for six months to get the basic proficiencies of working in a professional kitchen up to industry standards while thinking about what the next six months should look like.

As I began the actual transition, I worked three days a week at my original strategy job and three days a week in a professional kitchen as an unpaid intern. That left me with one day a week to work on additional research and also help on the side with other cooking projects like private events where I’d assist chefs with private parties and dinners. I held this schedule for the first three months

while I began to close out clients and projects at my day job. This encompassed the middle of December 2014 thru the end of March 2015. In April of 2015, I changed my schedule over and began cooking for another company in various restaurants they owned, five days a week. I was actually getting paid to cook in restaurants and learn from their chefs, which was just as instrumental as the previous experience in a completely different way. I maintained my previous job at the strategy firm the other two days a week, so I was working seven days a week. This break neck pace was not sustainable long term, but I wanted to ensure I captured every opportunity possible while I could.

At the beginning of the transition, I kept asking myself, “What do I want to do next?” and was having a hard time answering the question definitively. I changed the question and started asking myself, “What do I want to

do?" But that still did not help me answer anything. So I shortened the question even more and started asking, "What do I want?" This seemed like such a simple question, and yet, it is really at the center of life – knowing what we want and being able to act on it in a real and satisfying way is one of the most difficult processes as it turns out!

The first thing that came to mind is that I knew I wanted to finally take a trip I had put on hold multiple times over the course of the previous decade. I had always wanted to travel to Spain, ever since I studied Spanish literature and poetry while I was at Reed College. I could not do a semester abroad because of scholarship restrictions and degree focus, so the trip was postponed. When I knew I wanted to move into cooking full time, I wanted to take a two week vacation but realized I should really work as much as possible and save money for whatever phase came next. After repeatedly asking myself "what do I WANT" every day for a week or two, I realized going to Spain would be a reality. However, as my true passion revealed itself to be food fundamental education, it was clear that I needed to embark on additional research and field study experiences. Quickly, the idea of "I'll finally take the vacation to Spain," turned into the idea of, "I need to spend some time living in Spain, learning about their cuisine, techniques, traditions, food culture and progressive movements."

Anyone in the culinary field today can tell you that Spain is essentially the current Mecca of our industry. It combines the longest standing culinary traditions steeped in culture and history and strife, with the most progressive chefs and teams in the world that are pushing the limits of food science and gastronomy, asking questions that we didn't know existed a few years ago. If there's one place to go study food today, it's Spain.

And so my next six months was decided; move to Spain.

Qui et va ensenyar a cuinar? i com vas començar a introduir-te en el món de la cuina professional?

I had many teachers, both past and present, that taught me to cook. From a very young age, both my parents taught me how to cook in two very different styles and approaches. And more recently, as I began to work in kitchens professionally, I already had a number of friends who were chefs, that welcomed me into their kitchens to learn while helping.

My most influential teacher in the past year has been a dear friend of mine, Chef Brendan McGill. He is an incredible chef, wonderful friend, and endless positive force in the lives of people he knows. He volunteered to take me on as a student and get my skills to a level that would help me find work as well as ensure wherever I cooked I would be a positive extension of his name and brand. He asked me tough questions, gave me tough tasks, instilled discipline of practicing the most basic skills constantly to maintain a solid work ethic and consistent quality and execution of product.

Quina va ser la teva primer feina com a cuinera professional? Què va fer que et decidissis per començar en aquest primera feina?

My first job as a paid cook was working in an Italian restaurant, learning full animal butchery and making handmade pasta. This job came about after my three months of being an unpaid intern with Brendan. There is a very famous chef in my city, Tom Douglas, who has 13 restaurants. His team of chefs and cooks have decades of experience in numerous disciplines and cuisines. I told them what I was interested in continuing to learn and at the time, butchery and charcuterie as well as bread making were at the top of that list. So they put me at the Italian restaurant where I could learn under a very accomplished and progressive chef that would take time to teach me through the process of actually making charcuterie projects like coppa, lomo, panchetta and cured salamis.

Qui va ser el teu primer “mentor”?

My first mentor in cooking is definitely Brendan <http://hitchcockrestaurant.com/hitchcock/contact.html>. While I also had a few chefs that have been very supportive and instrumental in me pushing ahead with this change, such as Thierry Rautureau, Brendan has really been my first mentor in this industry.

Outside of cooking, I have a number of mentors. My most influential mentor of my adult career is my former boss and dear friend, Lori Stutsman. She is the owner of the company I worked at, for the previous 9 years, and taught me numerous valuable lessons about owning, growing and running a successful business as well as work ethic, marketing strategy, fulfilling your passions and choosing your own path. She has given me the chance to grow and learn by trial and error, a method I was lucky enough to have access to, which many people do not get the opportunity to experience.

Què recordes de l'etapa de transició mentre deixaves la teva anterior feina i començaves amb la nova? Vas tenir por de fer el canvi? Et vas sentir acompanyada?

I remember feeling constantly terrified every day when I woke up. This lasted the entire year before I started working in restaurants, as well as every single day I woke up during the six month transition as I continued to move away from the standard stability of a 9-5 career (and the benefits like a salary that accompany that lifestyle). Sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night, riddled with questions, worrying about how I was going to make it all work. And every morning when my alarm went off, I would lay in bed and ask myself, "what have I done? Am I crazy? Is this crazy? Will this work?"

Of course, the fact that I was asking myself those questions meant I was preparing more than enough and that while it was indeed crazy, it needed to be crazy in order to work. I needed to completely change the way I lived my life in order to fully embrace my true passion.

I was completely surrounded by a wonderful support network of colleagues, friends and family, and yet I felt

completely alone. My work colleagues were incredibly supportive and still are, even though I was leaving them. They agreed it was the right decision for me, and did everything they could to help my transition go smoothly. My friends and family stood by me when I was afraid or worried, helped me when I had times I couldn't get it all done on my own because I had created more work than I could handle, and celebrated with me when I experienced successes, however large or small they were.

But as the six months of transition went further along and I was in the middle of planning my move to Spain, everything became much more intense. I felt more alone even though I was spending more time with the people I loved, knowing I would soon be saying goodbye to them.

Com a experta en màrqueting et vas crear un bloc, un web i ara estàs fent un viatge d'aprenentatge. Quines altres coses vas fer, fas o faràs per donar-te a conèixer i aconseguir el teu somni?

There are so many things I want to try, test, see and achieve to fulfill my passion. Many more things than I can write in one interview! I would like to repeat this process in other countries, traveling around and learning how to cook from all different chefs and home cooks, to continue becoming a walking encyclopedia of cooking techniques and ideas. I would like to get a reservation to eat at El Celler de Can Roca while I'm in Spain. I would like to deep sea fish in the Pacific, and take a hunting trip with my dad and brother-in-law. I'd like to work in the kitchen with my accomplished chef friends, cooking for people like us who love food enough to just let us cook for them without a menu or preconceived idea of what should be done in the kitchen.

I would like to study in the El Bulli Foundation Lab to understand the process of true innovation in the culinary world. And I would like to build a small place all my own on the islands near where I grew up in Seattle, Washington, USA. The San Juan Islands are an incredibly beautiful, sacred place and I would love to have a retreat there with a simple and

open kitchen, a garden and some time to just cook things

I have book marked in countless cook books, magazines, websites and written down on napkins from friends and chefs alike. But as far as fulfilling my work goals, I would like to take the next decade to work on building food education that focuses on fundamental skills in the kitchen that moves home cooks away from the idea that they need to use a recipe to cook. I want to help them break down barriers they have when it comes to just cooking what is fresh and in season, using flavors and techniques that professional cooks use, and understand enough food science to feel the freedom to try something new without fear of failure or the need to buy many ingredients only used by one recipe.

Què t'està aportant el que estàs fent ara comparat amb haver deixat una feina estable i segura? Què trobes a faltar de la teva anterior feina?

I miss my colleagues from all my previous jobs. Being in Spain is wonderful but trying to find work and the opportunities to work in kitchens is difficult and lonely. Of course I miss my friends and family and the people I worked with in the United States are both friends and family to me. I miss having the security of paid work, and also feeling like my purpose for that day is evident every day I wake up. It is difficult to wake up many days and not know what I am going to do that day, or what I should do with my time. But learning how to be comfortable in that feeling is as important during my time here in Spain as the actual learning of cooking Spanish cuisine and culture. I need to embrace feeling relaxed and not always having something to do or be busy. I need to regain that balance in my life. This time in Spain, however long I'm here and wherever I travel or if I am lucky enough to cook in a kitchen here, all the experiences I have are equal in importance.

Com t'imagines la teva feina d'aquí a 10 anys? On creus que estaràs? Amb qui estaràs? Com et sents imaginant-ho?

I have no idea what my job will look like in ten years, but I hope that I have started to develop and deliver the food education content through multiple mediums such as print, web/online, live classes, radio and television. I believe all the mediums are necessary to provide content in the different learning modalities that speak to each individual.

I would love to be living back in Seattle in 10 years time. Between now and then, I imagine I will live in many different places, countries, cities, countryside, and lots of traveling.

Who do I want to be? That is the same question to me as “what do I want”? I want to be a passionate teacher and student that is able to be present and appreciate the world around me, while still having the same drive and ambition I have today. I would like to find a partner to share those experiences with, that possesses the same ambition and compassion I strive to embody.

Com arribes a la conclusió de que has de fer aquest viatge i per què?
En quina part o aspecte del viatge has posat més expectatives per assolir el teu somni?
Com sabràs que ja has aconseguit el que volies en aquest viatge?

I think i answered this question earlier, but let me know if not. As for which part of this trip I have the most expectations for to fulfill my goals, I think I am the most concerned with finding work in one or two kitchens to learn the techniques in this country to see how different it is here versus the kitchens in the United States. However I also think the real important part is me finding balance in my time and expectations of myself.

Sé que cada any et proposes aplicar un nou lema i que el segueixes al peu de la lletra. Pots explicar-me, si us plau, els que t'has marcat aquests últims anys?

The sayings I have had over the last few years are:

1. Ask for what you want
2. Find all the things that scare you and do them
3. Nothing taxing, just relaxing
4. Be present with today, enjoy this moment of life

Com tens planificat el viatge? Quins són els punts clau, les “fites”, que esperes aconseguir en aquest viatge? Amb qui et fa més il·lusió treballar, conèixer, o descobrir durant aquest viatge?

I have a list of cities or towns I want to visit that are based on the restaurants, chefs, techniques, traditions or foods each place is known for around the world or within Spain. Although, more than what they are known for, I have an interest in learning them, so they are at the top of my list (things like sobrassada, butifarra, ensiamadas, etcetra).

Què esperes obtenir del viatge?

I want to obtain experiences I can't quantify. I want to meet people I won't meet anywhere else, eat food I didn't know existed, learn skills and techniques I had not imagined possible and learn about who I really am and discover the next best version of myself. I want to obtain a different type of security in myself, that no matter where I go, I will be fine, I can find my way, I can trust myself and I don't always have to be busy.

Creus que és “normal” que una persona pugui permetre's fer un viatge d'aprenentatge durant 9-10 mesos? Per què vas decidir fer-ho així?

I don't think there is a “normal” for this – I don't know of anyone that has been able to identify what should be normally achieved, because although this process of learning how to cook in other countries is common in our industry, everyone has their own unique reasons for doing this kind of trip. I decided to do this because I felt Spain (the people, traditions and approach to food and life) shares something with my approach and passion for life and shared experience. I knew I could have many experiences at the same time and get the most out of my time abroad by starting in Spain.

Com explicaries el que aquestes fent -el teu somni- en un tweet?

I want to teach and help people to break the barriers of the kitchen and to do so without recipe. I want to innovate with fundament.

We will see you in New York.

Be happy Siiri.

Lluís Muns i Terrats

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