

BRANDON EDWIN CHROSTOWSKI

FOUNDER, PRESIDENT AND CEO

EDWINS
LEADERSHIP & RESTAURANT
Institute



Brandon Edwin Chrostowski is on a mission to change the face of re-entry in the United States. In 2007, he founded EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute. His belief that “every human being regardless of their past has the right to a fair and equal future” is what drove the creation of EDWINS.

The idea for EDWINS was born from "a break" that Brandon received early in life and has grown into a six-month program conducted at EDWINS restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio as well as in prison. His approach is simple: arm those re-entering society with a skill set and a smile. The program provides training in culinary arts and the hospitality industry. Students in the program are not only equipped with basic culinary skills, they also receive help with the following: finding employment, free housing, basic medical care, clothing, job coaching, literacy programs and more.

Brandon began his career in Detroit 16 years ago and has since trained in some of the world’s finest restaurants. He received an associate degree in Culinary Arts and a bachelor’s degree in Business and Restaurant Management from The Culinary Institute of America. He apprenticed at Chicago’s legendary restaurant Charlie Trotters and after graduation worked at Lucas Carton, Paris’ longest standing Michelin 3-star restaurant. At Lucas Carton, Brandon began to develop cutting-edge skills while learning the intricacies of a French kitchen.

After spending time in Europe, he decided to return to the United States to further refine what he learned in France. In New York City, he worked at Le Cirque, Picholine and Chanterelle, a New York Times and James Beard award-winning restaurant, while working under the tutelage of restaurateurs Karen and David Waltuck. At Chanterelle, Brandon also worked closely with Master Sommelier Roger Dagorn and was so inspired became a certified sommelier himself.

Leaving New York to start EDWINS in Cleveland was the next step. He chose Cleveland because it is a city with high incarceration and poverty yet it is in a region who understood re-entry and it’s potential. In 2011 the program began in Grafton prison and in 2013 the restaurant and institute opened its doors in Cleveland. Brandon’s commitment to EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute has grown from teaching in prisons to opening its flagship restaurant as well as building a 20,000-square foot campus that offers free housing, workout facility, library, basketball court and other amenities. Today EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute graduates over 100 students a year between its prison program and restaurant institute.

Chrostowski’s philosophy is simple: make it happen. No matter what the problem is, it can be solved with hard work and care. This approach has led to the success of EDWINS and a revolution in the nonprofit world. Issues from housing, health care and substance abuse treatment are all addressed while at EDWINS. Graduates of the program have gained employment in Cleveland’s finest restaurants after finishing the program or after release from prison. The results have been astounding 97% employment after graduation and 1% recidivism.

The success of this work and other initiatives led by Chrostowski has earned him dozens of awards including the 2016 CNN Hero, The Richard Cornuelle Award from the Manhattan Institute for Social Entrepreneurship as well as Crain's 40 under 40. He has spoken at a number of universities and corporations but is most proud of his TED X talk, his speech at The United States Senate and The City Club. Fighting for fair and equal opportunities has also earned Chrostowski media from countless outlets such as The New York Times, Washington Post, The City Journal, Forbes, Food & Wine, The Irish Times, HR Magazine, The Cleveland Plain Dealer and more. He has also been featured on Steve Harvey as a Harvey's Hero, TD Jakes, CNN, NBC, ABC, NPR, WKSU and is the feature of the newly released documentary called Knife Skills by Oscar winner Thomas Lennon.

Brandon continues his commitment to the community. He was so upset with the condition of Cleveland's inner city and local leadership that he ran for mayor in the 2017 election. He finished fourth out of nine candidates in the primary surprising many in the political circle. Brandon is a proud father of two, Leo and Lilly and is crazy about his wife Catana.

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