

Dedicated to my first client and beloved friend, **Maggi Hodge.**

CONTENTS



Chapter 1: Bored to Board	Page 3
Chapter 2: Board Theme Ideas	Page 9
Chapter 3: Working With Influencers.....	Page 15
Chapter 4: Standing Out	Page 21

Chapter 1: Bored to Board

Let's be honest. Working for someone else has never been thrilling. In fact, it can be quite draining, boring, annoying, tough, confusing, repetitive, exhausting, redundant, humiliating,...(and you can insert a few more of your own adjectives). Granted, "jobs" are a great thing. They pay the rent, the phone bill, the Netflix bill, and other "necessities" of life; plus they can have really awesome bonuses like paid vacations. But, for me, after working over 10 years in the service and catering industry, I found that one can get a bit...well,... *bored*. Bored with the same, mundane tasks day in and day out.

I wanted more. I wanted better. I wanted... fun, exciting, challenging, engaging, and lucrative. So there came a day when I switched things up at my normal nine-to-five job. I decided to get creative. I wasn't concerned with the "last-minute special" that Chef told me to recite... or Becky's lemon she wanted with her sparkling Badoit (*This ebook is not sponsored by*

Badoit or Becky :-). I had freedom to walk and talk to clients, make snacks for them, and even sit at my desk and doodle. It was fabulous.

Then, one day when I was making charcuterie boards for clients, something happened.

A client said “Wow! This is stunning. You should sell these!”



Talk about a light-bulb moment. Getting confirmation for my board being worth money was like being a guest on The Oprah Show when she announces everyone gets cars! It was exhilarating and enlightening. I couldn't get the idea of making money by selling boards out of my mind. I

sent some inspirational photos to a dear friend of mine to see what she thought. The results? She was my first client!

I learned so much doing my first gig. But not nearly as much as all the lessons I endured along the way. From permits to pricing and not any icing. At times I felt like giving up. Where was all the money? Why was I paying sales tax on a delivery fee? And how in the world am I going to deliver ten boards that are three feet long in my Sonada? But guess what? I didn't give up. I figured it all out. Granted, it took a lot of time and money but it was worth it all because now I run a successful business and I can help others so they don't have the learning curve that I did! To help others get started, I created [The Graze Academy](#), an online resource with training programs, coaching programs, articles, and books like this one!

Bored? Not anymore! I felt so alive!

One time, I remember calling out sick to do a corporate event for a swanky gym. Having to wake up at 5:00AM to style a table for a bunch of wealthy humans was *thrilling*. But even then, I was learning valuable lessons! Unfortunately, I ended up sleeping through my alarm and was an hour late

to set up this table. Yup. Another mistake I learned in the beginning. I now set five alarms and always give myself two hours to prepare a table!

Did you catch that tip?

But on this gloomy morning I had exactly 52 minutes to set up for 75 people. Lucky for me the towel boy helped me get this done in 40 minutes flat! No one was even upset. Everyone was in shock over the beautiful colors and artful collections on the table. The staff couldn't believe it was all edible. Organic raspberries floating inside a fresh coconut, french brie cheese drizzled with honeycomb, and vegan donuts laced with a maple glaze. I was literally on cloud nine after seeing the staff's reactions over my completed table..



Then came lesson number two.

When the members approached my table, I didn't get the same reaction.

"Is this organic? I don't think it is." "Um, why are there donuts on the table?" "Can I just have a banana?"

These were some of the things I heard from the members I was looking forward to feeding. I bit my tongue and remembered that I have to represent my business.

"Yes Ma'am! I try to buy everything organic when it is available. Yes Sir! You can have a banana, but are you sure you don't want to dive into this donut, it's vegan?"

Even during all the difficult times and long nights prepping the fruits and cheeses, I still couldn't be happier that I got to work for myself and create art for a living. It may not be for everyone, but neither is working in a

cubicle, and if you love working with food and have an artistic flair, this might be just the business for you!

In under two years of business, I was featured on Sirius XM radio, working with clients I never would have dreamed of, and making money in one day what used to take me a month to make when working in a “job”.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish you the best on your journey of boards and tables and creating something you love. This is an incredible business and I wouldn't go back to doing nine-to-five for anything. What about you? If not now, when? If you think about working at your current job for twenty years does that make your left eye twitch a little or does it light you up? They say one of the keys to success is to find something you love to do, so you never really have to



“work” another day in your life. May you do what you love... and make money doing it!

Chapter 2: Board Themes

One of the keys to success in this business that I also learned early in the game, was to get creative and have board “themes”. Board themes are when you design your boards around a specific topic, event, holiday, color scheme, activity, or other area of interest.

When it comes to finding a new theme for your board, you may think it can get tricky. "There are only so many ways I can put cheese and meat on a board with grapes," you say.

That's not true.

There are hundreds of ways to present each board and make it look different every time. Although I cannot go over every potential theme, I can give you ideas that will hopefully inspire you to create more exciting boards.

For one thing, consider specific themes such as special occasions, seasons, and even specific color themes.



Additionally, you can get really creative when it comes to posting boards on your social media. These boards aren't necessarily boards that were paid for from a client but more so for marketing your brand. Here is a list of example boards you can create for social: (Bonus: Using leftover product from an event saves you money.)

Reality TV show board: Is there a show (reality or Netflix) that is trending where you can make a board featuring a popular item? For example, *The Bachelor*, you could create a cheese board with a heavy emphasis on roses. The color pallet could be red, and you

could use rose petals or the head of a rose, or have rose flavored jam. The point is to create something that is popular and showcases your creative skills.

Another trend is **horoscope signs**. Can you create a Taurus symbol out of prosciutto? Or Orion's Belt with brie?

In the USA we have a big thing called **Shark Week**. Who doesn't love watching sharks nervously while chomping down on rosemary crackers? You can customize this board with shark-shaped candies, goldfish crackers, or use a shark toy and put a chunk of asiago in it's mouth.

You can also think of **national holidays**. There is literally a random national holiday every day. Besides the obvious like Halloween and Valentines Day, you can google what days are what. If it's national Grilled Cheese Day, try adding small bites of grilled cheese on a board.

Here are a few excellent random holidays that make excellent themes for your boards... mark your calendar with these important dates:

1/20 National Cheese Lovers Day

7/25 National Wine & Cheese Day

6/4 National Cheese Day

11/28 Small Business Saturday

Speaking of Social Media, it's important to keep posting and showing your skills even if you don't have any clients. That is how you will gain *new* clients. Practice makes perfect for finding your flavor and what you are really good at.

I also recommend celebrating your mini-wins when it comes to followers. Did you get your first 100, 500, or 1000 followers?

Beautiful, make a board in the shape of that number. It looks amazing and shows your gratitude for all your new followers!

I also want to touch on **Small Business Saturday**. I recommend doing a Giveaway on this day, if not other days. This is a great way to engage with your audience, build more of a following, and put your product out there for more eyes to see. This giveaway can be a small grazing box or a set of cheese knives.

Obviously these give-aways should be for your local followers only.

Continuing on our topic of themes, when it comes to clients hosting a party, I like to always weave in a delicate color or prop that is related to their event. For example, a **baby shower board** would have either blue or pink emphasized with fruits, jams, candies, etc.; **a wedding board** would have pops of white; a birthday board would weave in one of their favorite treats; and a “Barkcutterie” board

would be dog friendly food. Believe it or not, those exist here in Los Angeles.

If you are in the beginning stages of reaching out to clients, you can offer a board that is **related to their brand**. So if you reached out to a yoga studio, you could create a board full of organic produce that represents chakras. The themes and possibilities are endless.



Chapter 3: Working with Influencers

My business, Olive & Nectar, bloomed beautifully after working with my first influencer. Not only did I gain hundreds of new followers but booked three big clients after my first event for her. Did I know that was going to happen? No. Does that happen every time with other influencers? No. So how do you know what influencers will really change the game for you? You honestly don't. However, there are the obvious and not so obvious signs that someone might not be the right fit for you.

I have invested time and money into working with other influencers who were verified, on TV, and even had nearly a million followers, and still... I came out with nothing. Well, if you count 23 new followers then I guess that is something.

My point is to not invest your time on someone just because they have a blue checkmark. It needs to make sense for you, your business and your brand.

Here is my experience. I worked with someone on a reality TV show who posted the grazing table as the photo after the main photo and mentioned my company's name at the bottom of the caption. That was a great lesson for me because I didn't state in the agreement that she needs to put us as her first photo and shout us out at the top of her caption. I also would love to have a say in the photo she

picked. It was a dark up-close image of cashews and a block of parmigiano! Really? Boring. I wouldn't follow me either.



Another time I worked for a really nice woman who had a strong social media following and I thought it would be a hit. She was verified, had over 200K followers and seemed like she was doing big things. I took my lessons I learned from the previous work I did with influencers and applied them here. It was great. I got the shout-out, the perfectly shot posts, and even her friends reposted me.

But you know what wasn't so great? The minimal interaction on my page and only getting a handful of followers. What the heck was happening? When I took these experiences and compared them to my successful influencer I worked with, I saw a bit of a pattern.

The Reality TV stars following didn't really get a chance to see the table let alone view my page. The nice "verified" woman who posted my business beautifully, didn't have a following who was really into what I had to offer. And sometimes that happens. You have to think about location, brand, and age. Where do they live? Is

it really serving your company to work with someone who has a majority of followers across the world? What are they selling? Are they in the health and wellness industry? Comedy? Or finance? This needs to link up with YOUR brand. That's a big part of it. And lastly, age. You can't work with Hannah Montana with 1M followers and expect a bunch of 14 year old girls to hire you.

Here is my advice to you. Find someone who is in the realm of food blogging, entrepreneurship, wellness, or veganism (if you can rock a vegan board), or even **big** on *beauty*. I want to emphasize BIG because the influencer that I work with has nearly one million followers and is verified and also lives in Southern California. The age of her followers is 20-40 years old and they love anything and everything she loves. Anytime I got a call from someone that saw me on her page they would freak out (in a good way) and hire me immediately. Sometimes people just want to be like other people. Those people will *also* be your people.

At the end of the day it all comes down to being prepared with your Influencer Service Agreement, making sure their people are women and men who love to host parties, and not hiring someone just because of the amount of followers they have. You never know, some people could have bought their followers who are actually just robots.

A lot of big influencers charge a pretty penny to be featured on their stories, let alone their page. Unless you have the marketing budget to spend on top of your service, I recommend trying to find an influencer willing to do trade with you. How do you do that?

Keep tabs on when their birthday is, if they are pregnant or engaged, or other major events. Timing is crucial for this. When they can utilize a unique service for free that they actually need, you win *and* they win. You can easily reach out to a big influencer and offer your services in exchange for a feature on their page or story.

Remember to be clear on what you want and what you are going to offer.



Chapter 4: Stand Out

“How do I stand out?”

This is a common question I hear from my students/clients. I always respond with:

“You make you stand out!”

It’s not just your abundant showcase of gorgeous produce layered next to aged asiago. It’s the man or woman behind the logo that is getting hired. You close all the deals, not your latest Instagram post. Those help get the clients to YOU, but the photos can’t send the invoice.

There are people who respond to clients emails with five words or less and then there are people who send a caring email customized to their clients suggesting they should jump on a call to see if there are any ways they can make their event extra special.

There are people who get paid, do the table, and never talk to their client again. Then there are other people who make customized thank you cards, follow up after the event, and have a recurring client.

Be warm, be professional, and be on time. Have fun. Don't compare yourself with other companies or accounts. Most accounts are in your same shoes. At the end of the day, you will get hired. There are plenty of events to go around and you can't do all of them.



Now there are ways to make your brand stand out. I recommend doing this with a prop, dip, signature menu, engraved board, or cocktail napkin. For

example, my logo is a hummingbird. I would love to find a gold hummingbird paper weight to include on all my styled tables. That's one way to brand. Another way is, I always use olive tapenade.

Or you can create a customized menu giving the client options to pick from. Etsy is a great place to find boards where you can customize your logo on

them. Get creative, let other companies inspire you, but don't copy. That is a way to make yourself blend in like oranges next to apricots. The way you will stand out is by doing something different.

Ultimately, creating grazing boards and tables is an ideal business.

Even if you're already a caterer, what a great skill to add to your arsenal of offerings. But here's the thing. It's, unfortunately, not as easy as buying some nuts and prepping some parm. It's not even as easy as being a really good food artist or being really great with people. In truth, I took a lot of tumbles before I really got to a



place where I understood not only the details of permits and party planning, but also of food per-person ratios, hard costs versus profits, exceptional food choices with artistic themes, shopping right, and so much more. And

business you love from scratch. I offer an “appetizer” course that teaches you how to create a Flat Lay from start to finish and our main course is for the person who is ready to start their business called Board to Business Blueprint.

You can pick and choose (or should I say, graze?) to see which option fits your goals and your budget best. Simply [check out the selections here!](#)

I hope you’ve found this ebook helpful and I look forward to seeing your creations and helping you with your business!

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