Justin Prochnow ([00:00](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=Kcq3NrCpJMGg5ybgInwkYrsWGaTttblvwHyCyCTWp5aL-s2l9k4lLFj1yRa812COcapJv2-oDxGCCTE1SvtrgAwmjhM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=0.18)):

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Hello and welcome to Legal Food Talk. I'm your host, Justin Prochnow, a shareholder in the Denver office of the international law firm Greenberg Traurig, and this is a podcast brought to you by our food, beverage and agribusiness practice to give you some insights and knowledge about the world of food, beverage and agribusiness.

Welcome to another edition of Greenberg Traurig's Legal Food Talk. I'm your host, Justin Prochnow. I'm going somewhat solo today. Michael Goodman on assignment, which probably means he's off playing tennis somewhere. But today I'm joined by one of my other colleagues here at Greenberg Traurig. A relatively new addition compared to others here, although it's now been longer than I probably thought at one time. Please allow me to introduce you to my colleague Riley Lagesen. Welcome, Riley.

Riley Lagesen ([01:25](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=3k8pSHq_FTsp0ND9p0ZrcwQHRpBUwDL9l_6v4R_eCJE9HW-fXvoRCk6or23QL5T5miXXTQXVpSLRsHiFtHjWGGk3csE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=85.38)):

Yeah, thanks so much, Justin. Great to be here.

Justin Prochnow ([01:27](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=trQx5elALkgpsVetUtYFi76IoK7sc9J6Ykb0u0IQVDXH9rrXqJV_rGdg-e1rkztKEF6Ra7zxMzod3fgYeIlIeLYbs0U&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=87.72)):

When did you join the firm? Now, if I can remember, was it end of January, beginning of February maybe?

Riley Lagesen ([01:33](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=n6J06_H37iXY66mN_JHbDoSLHdGCye5M3zSgb6gXe5wbAy5hXt5rPHorbEazM7e-1VEZXiMe9-X0oZNOZlA2f5rqtKI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=93.6)):

Our team joined February 1st, and it's been just an amazing almost six months.

Justin Prochnow ([01:38](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=P7wHTsrEE5VejAZVTkEoScdwNGRdkkZNfKpJzAAUPgzz4-R8MT3ZeEfZlF0ZktVOAJG_G1d4JN0cKsIZ9saPFITbzjk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=98.16)):

Well, great. Let's talk a little bit first. Tell us a little bit about yourself. You're up in the Pacific Northwest. I did a little looking, and we've obviously talked a bunch, but I did a little looking, and it doesn't always seem like maybe the law was your initial focus. I think you went to school for cinema at one point, is that correct?

Riley Lagesen ([01:58](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=-o6mkXJWgYqel9ng3Oo1TkhwBxwTBRiF07nR4iSB7YjqfPunjkrcGF5Yq5v_Ew04x966cjGNhFucwDjxQtHPhxhhnks&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=118.53)):

Correct. Yes, I got into the restaurant industry and law somewhat, I'd say, by accident. I attended film school at the University of Southern California, where I was in the screenwriting program, and thought I was going to have a career writing scripts. And like many film school graduates, as soon as graduating, I needed to support myself, and so I got a job working at a restaurant called Baja Sharkeez in Manhattan Beach. And I thought I would be there only for a few months, but I ended up being there for almost five years, working essentially every weekend and every shift imaginable during that time, doing every job that could possibly think of in the space.

And then after around five years, developed a fast, casual, better for you concept with some friends of mine called American Bento Company, and opened that in Manhattan Beach, and did that for a couple of years, opening some locations before deciding to sell my interest to my colleague in that business, and to go to law school to start a practice focusing on restaurants. So been doing that for the last around 20 years, and I've had a opportunity to work with a lot of great clients and people and team members around the country and the world, and excited to bring our team to Greenberg Traurig.

Justin Prochnow ([03:11](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=QBsnnM_4c442v5IkQhb8kvX5QL9-NtnihpGO_Krdf2QvcqgHdHdpqnPzm2Uu1qkwQSzswuLYz2PRNIRWysyNGoAHqDw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=191.4)):

I think sometimes it's hard to get out of that cycle when you're in the restaurant business, because it's a different world than everyone else's, and you run under a different time clock because you're working till, depending on the restaurant or bar, sometimes till 12:00, 1:00 in the morning, and you're getting up later in the day. And you're just on a different time clock than everyone else. So sometimes I think it's hard to break out of that cycle and get into the same routine that a lot of other people are in.

Riley Lagesen ([03:39](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=DuVTVsPWyXP-ahohyBwfehkrT_vxib3OZe24VnV3z7FvA3ypyBICp3lemTTKnwlMaxIcj1qan65nKe_-UxXws9wJqB8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=219)):

Yes, especially when you're working late every night and getting up early. But it's a demanding business, but a lot of fun. And I think I learned more in the restaurant business and time I was there than I ever learned in school about business, about life, and about things that are really important with respect to client service, and treating people at well, and being a great teammate. All of that translates very well into any profession, but especially in the practice of law.

Justin Prochnow ([04:06](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=F_w956CMUEtGzfFj4Kbugc9qq5kqUdLhh_jkJ9I4XpDa5gCan4T-8wBu5Si5VhcfHSImCBhsXG8gQJ2ZYohM_TAXDDo&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=246.6)):

Well, we were obviously really excited to have you come over, maybe no one more so than me. Obviously, working in the food beverage, agribusiness sectors, to work on a lot of different projects together. Maybe you could tell the listeners here a little bit more about your group specifically. I know you are the restaurant group, but what specifically do you guys do to help out restaurants and other companies in the food industry?

Riley Lagesen ([04:37](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=KWvb6VD-gSU8jcw8MpjNmeReoSPJZKw3OqBOqgGnZouLEYhlY7TExqXi2U_1LtutL6xp4r-u5dXmXnweiw8-qFLUfpY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=277.8)):

Yeah, it's a great question, Justin, and there's a lot of firms out there that say they have industry-focused practices. It's become, I think, a valuable marketing tool for law firms over the last couple of decades especially, but our group is, I think, differentiated by the level of immersion into the industry and into the contacts and relationships we have with key people in key organizations that really matter, and have been doing this for a very long time. And it's not something that you do part-time. Personally, it's full-time, all I've done for the last 20 or so years in the legal space is an intensive focus on the restaurant industry on a local, regional, national, and global scale as much as possible.

And so our team provides services across a number of different important areas for restaurateurs. When I was a client of law firms as a restaurateur, it gave me the idea that wouldn't it be amazing if there was a law firm that really had experienced, substantive specialists in the areas that matter most to restaurant clients? Because we worked with a lot of good firms, but rarely did we find a firm where somebody really understood the actual needs of restaurateurs because they were doing it vicariously. They had not actually been in the business, and to have people with experience in the space providing services could be really valuable.

And the areas of largest importance for most of our clients are on the corporate side. Finance, transactional, general business, M&A, but employment, real estate, intellectual property, immigration, privacy, data security, labor related issues, union issues, financial regulatory issues. These are all very important to restaurant industry clients. And restaurants, as many as there are, and from small to large, they're some of the most heavily regulated business in the country, and they're also businesses that all have very important and diverse legal needs. So the legal needs are varied and diverse, and sometimes complicated, and all restaurants can benefit from having great legal counsel. And if having a practice in a team that covers these important areas with great experience and great interest and dedication to the space makes us very efficient and hopefully a tremendous value add to our clients.

Justin Prochnow ([07:06](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=i9Symxrod1BzU9nVVCBnODdJCUrzrCYyfXGhE_ihAqeDAFrJ4Pm5_M-rznqWKvAQpsVz_tSDHKWt1Et_x93yzBxzScU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=426.21)):

But it seems like there are probably a lot of firms out there who have restaurant clients but aren't necessarily restaurant lawyers. You can have clients in a lot of different industries, and probably provide some services to them, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you really know that industry, as opposed to someone like you in your group, who you're working with them all the time. I would expect in some ways that you operate like a general counsel to some of these restaurants.

Riley Lagesen ([07:43](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=zvRTnYttQxJUmyTn2z2C5m_p_QmZ1vHAV-HI1IjprO5kptML9tirSa6NIrNKP4kdk40T5TUh0SLXvDn45f9n3ih2TaM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=463.08)):

Yeah. I do play an outside general counsel role to a number of different clients, and compliment the services of in-house counsel with a number of clients, as does our team. I think the choice that I made and other attorneys have done and analogous practices is to really make a full commitment to practicing and dedicating to a certain industry and certain substantive areas in that industry a long time ago. And it's a big risk. And, initially, when you're putting all your eggs in one basket.

But it has been said, if you're going to do that, you want to have a big basket, and the restaurant industry is a large basket. It's one of the largest industries in the country, one of the most significant employers and important employers in the country, and the motivating force has always been it's one of the most important industries for jobs, for opportunity, for people from all different countries, all different walks of life. There's a place in the restaurant industry for everyone.

And it's really exciting to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses and help them find opportunities for people to achieve their dreams, whatever they might be. And so to be really hopefully good at what you do in anything, you have to decide, are you going to dedicate yourself 100%? And anything short of that, it's not possible to be the best at what you do, no matter what it is. And so there's certainly space for generalism in the legal industry and others, but if you really want to be as valuable as you can to your clients and to your teammates, having a very intense focus will usually yield the best results.

Justin Prochnow ([09:22](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=Tq8IdRk5miV5kK_BEAyN9S1V4-u8L8aagv_04eS08MsOL2jBp481q9lkq19aHIdUx2ShSlHcsG1LuoRARxzTbfk05HU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=562.53)):

Well, I think that's probably why we get along so well and have a lot of similar interests is for that same reason, that we both focused on a particular industry and meeting those clients' needs.

I want to talk a little bit, much like a lot of the conversation over the last two years, about the world during COVID and now, to some extent, post-COVID. Although, we're not exactly post-COVID yet, but past the initial quarantines. Obviously, maybe no industry, maybe other than the movie industry, was affected as much as the restaurant industry during COVID. And for some, it was a boon. If you were a pizza delivery company, as we know, there's not too many things that were more of a benefit to the pizza delivery industry than a pandemic outbreak where most restaurants are closed, and you have to order food to-go, you're pretty well set up if you're pizza delivery.

And so it really was somewhat dependent upon what type of restaurant and facilities you had, how nimble you were to change to the to-go format. But, obviously, it was a huge burden for the industry. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how some of your clients and how you and your team helped service some of your clients during the last two years.

Riley Lagesen ([10:53](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=7ZAG-hNBwdtvfUdeutjk_KDtZAcjFTMnfy182CDOdurRySU3hpSb3CN1-XV1OJI5OCLtZyBzekpHyQJ5S8aRjtjXfN8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=653.91)):

Yeah, well, COVID, I think, has been a mind bender for everybody for a whole lot of reasons. And restaurants, as you noted, were immediately impacted-

... restaurants, as you noted, were immediately impacted. I remember being in Seattle in March, on actually March 7th of 2020, and I found myself the only person in the entire restaurant at the hotel because there had been some COVID cases in Seattle and nobody was going out and it was very eerie.

Justin Prochnow ([11:20](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=t6OIA3I25pp5ADrcovpfFQojNwQ3xpVm34XhJCzFx9cla4azTob3_kskNoTvuBC6VB_lZhSea_NZ0Yg0-A20axwMy6U&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=680.85)):

Right. Seattle was ground zero in some -

Riley Lagesen ([11:23](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=wMIbjTpWjl6XW0aFdkr5_nN_TSw6vGWU5UPJ2ZRA60I-vlzmmjv9w-B-oXkzQUQD6olDtsu9pqyNhvvs7ezPtbenKrc&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=683.43)):

Yeah, it was a very eerie feeling. And then came back into town a few days later and things got progressively worse that week. And by the end of the week, there were announcements that businesses be shutting down, restaurants in particular. And at that point I reached out to the client, Guy Fieri, and said, "This is going to be catastrophic, not only for restaurants, but for restaurant employees because everybody's being laid off or furloughed." And he said, "We have to do something." And he's always been a very significant supporter of restaurant employees and very philanthropic. And within a couple of days we had put together the National Restaurant Employee Relief Fund, and working with the National Restaurant Association, Educational Foundation, and a number of different partners, within a couple weeks we'd raised almost $20 million to provide grants to restaurant employees, direct grants with absolutely no administrative cost, all the money going directly to employees.

And then in May, held the Nacho Average Showdown with our good friends Guy Fieri and his son, and Bill Murray and his son Homer, and Carla Hall and Terry Crews and Shaquille O'Neal participating and raised another several million dollars for employees. And our goal was to raise over a hundred million. We fell well short of that, but we still managed to provide over 40,000 grants to employees, which we really thought were going to be the lifeline we needed. And the next thing you know, the government is providing so much money to people who are out of work. I think the good thing about the Restaurant Employee Relief Fund, there were a lot of folks, by status, immigration status and so forth, that received money from the Restaurant Employee Relief Fund that may not have otherwise through the government grants, but it was really interesting to see how many people, and can't blame them, sit on the sidelines and take the government money and not work.

And we thought that would subside after time, but surprisingly enough, the industry still has not recovered from an employment standpoint. They're still running well low of the jobs that they had pre-pandemic, despite countless efforts to bring employees back into the restaurant space. So there's a lot of restaurants out there that are still in great need of great new team members. Wages have risen across the board throughout the industry nationally, benefits have increased across the board nationally, and there's a number of restaurant concepts that are far stronger now than they were going into the pandemic. And there's some certainly that are struggling. We also worked on the Restaurant Relief grant legislation that was enacted by Congress in 2021, in which around $29 billion was sent out to restaurants who could apply based upon their professed need for additional support and get grants that were pretty sizeable.

So there was $29 million deployed. We worked on both the House and Senate versions of that legislation. And we were certainly happy for those clients that received and others that received grants. The legislation, in our opinion, was imperfect and somewhat irresponsible in the way that it was constructed and managed, but those that received money from the program felt happy that they did. Unfortunately, there were a lot of deserving folks left out that did not receive grants, but overall the industry is fairly strong. And the things today that are impacting folks more than anyone is not so much COVID at the moment, but inflation and the rising cost of doing business in addition to the labor crunch and few other things going on the legislative and just with the general economy are making it more difficult, more expensive to operate successfully, but by and large, a lot of the COVID issues have generally subsided around the country at the moment.

Justin Prochnow ([15:35](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=bV3HX8vnp6r3otaO1MEmWicocTjKZexWfhYBEwlCKLUjWJsArouHBG7NioFGdCXc2mB15ysTbMX_3WXEMMc23Y3Ln7o&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=935.19)):

And supply chain, of course, is another huge issue for restaurants, both with what happened in Ukraine. I mean, a huge ... I know my experience has been with a lot of the finished packaged good companies, a shortage of sunflower oil that was often sourced from the Ukraine and other areas around Russia. A lot of companies are having to substitute it with safflower oil or soybean oil. And I would imagine it's the same in the restaurant industry, that there are some key ingredients ... I mean, you still go to the grocery store sometimes ... I know it seems like for a while hummus has been on really short supply. So I assume there's some sort of garbanzo bean, chickpea issue, because I haven't seen Sabra hummus in the store in quite some time.

Riley Lagesen ([16:28](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=CM6HkWjdsjrpll0HZlGOrU3yiqpB1W7IVg7Cwr8sW-ueGHNzmn7pLlSQQymOZh2bB_4zb9Uw0LfW-W54fuZKfYiI7jw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=988.08)):

Yeah. Well, I laugh because maybe that signals that Americans are eating healthier, but by the CDC data, that's the opposite case.

Justin Prochnow ([16:35](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=60Lpwq-5TnrAs4Y8c9ExsbTk6UqitSfpCJdmgc1RFZWogZ7QTcF9vEAQ3pBmxeGWymL1yn_6irBIxIktsAc7FfrxwMA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=995.97)):

Right.

Riley Lagesen ([16:36](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=u-O5VBYpTvyknNtBEkJnKen7vQ6myUGqc19ey5P_xVXk__0ZqvLKZaCejJL3Li-8FXNeJLs3F3LPlUePZ0Fuq5-ALzw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=996.69)):

I think there are serious supply chain issues out there and the other pressures that we've been talking about, it seems ... what I love about restauranteers in the industry is this resiliency and the can do attitude, that no matter what is thrown at these great entrepreneurs and employees, they come up and keep working and keep going. And the industry has been hit by so much over the last several years. It's almost hard to imagine, if you were talking three years ago, you could not script what this industry has been through, but groups are still optimistic. And I think those that have made it through are more confident and better situated for the future than they otherwise have been. So lots of challenges going on. This is always the case in the restaurant industry. It's never been easy before COVID. There are certainly a lot of problems and issues, especially in the west coast cities and in New York City, the operating costs and environments were very challenging. A lot of people forget that, but it's an industry -

Justin Prochnow ([17:43](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=wqgcv6LkOeHWgEw0z3H7hAcJ6e-4M8EWfDSNnEWOK6iNZDxwvtSMrVdlibXOwcG3RoEdgDfNKxLVcMoktRLCMdnIVcg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1063.98)):

Well it seems like -

Riley Lagesen ([17:44](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=I3XPvzN8rjpkvFtq82fHiJANyoJqThj5iMWwAilYTyhwVGxrBQ0c6QNekPeTWYLF-osTV6flo9c2scjS4svaCJ9zXi8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1064.7)):

- that's not for the timid. It's for those -

Justin Prochnow ([17:45](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=cnSUB-XDtTZ8kZZEaMePbzAZUVefg_IFD2tg8UD-f97DaHBwYD-_fnA_2PuNhnEZ9nNZdCWT4QwOUohRnwq2-JxhJjA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1065.9)):

And maybe it just goes without saying, but I'd be curious to know -

Riley Lagesen ([17:49](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=GhlR8EmWPvKUFIP8d6rc7vIYLVXPVO1DQvkLHFgJz-bcW7i2QbKrvsS4fMjxfNAXBDUECsWWKYCvi-of0ku251bqA9c&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1069)):

[crosstalk 00:17:49] - types that love working.

Justin Prochnow ([17:49](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=AgHNrDM9ifsANDyQuFR0FDUqqkTGE1PCvPg9nZH6mRVq_8_R8pcCFrogVyi1ZC_QPKv5cZd4yuuS7bk7PzGZKAuppSE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1069.65)):

- your experience from the restaurants you worked with. I mean, really being able to adapt and change on the fly was what helped a lot of companies stay afloat and be successful, both in COVID and other things, changing from strictly sit down to having a to go menu, switching to being able to order online instead of only ... I know for a lot of restaurants, the last thing they want to do is have orders picked up because it's not the same as if you're getting it there, but I would imagine to stay in business, those were the types of things they had to really think about doing.

Riley Lagesen ([18:40](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=UXiB5walVsCKBDWrxBJQImLA5RU8siHgqNuVCFaxUIMnL6kZNe09nFgkeaxHJuwoqa-D7v4OAYsjxgngiHjM7SzOQ10&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1120.74)):

Oh yeah, just tremendous creativity and adaptation. As you mentioned, to go orders and take out, delivery, some of the more significant areas of focus for brands, including brands that had never done that before. Lots of casual dining brands initiated takeout programs and delivery with third party, sometimes self delivery. Also, we noticed the proliferation of a lot of virtual brands, so many restaurant groups formed new brands or started new brands that they would operate within their own stores. So there's lots of examples of that around the country, where groups would supplement their existing offerings with new concepts under their own roof. And then the third party virtual concepts, such as Mr. Beast burger and some of the others that have been created by some of the groups out there have really made a wave of sorts across the industry.

And there's been a whole bunch of other groups that have evolved, a lot of different platforms in which to sell, companies that are vessel based or truck based or vending machine based. I mean, some of the most sophisticated technology in terms of robotic backed concepts, whether it's burgers or pizza or salads or coffee, I mean, there's been a lot of innovation that's been accelerated as a result of COVID. So it's been really interesting to see how groups have adapted and innovated throughout the last couple years. I think it really just accelerated what was going to happen by a couple of years, based upon the need and demand to change.

Justin Prochnow ([20:27](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=ynO9sPm79LS90nOzs-FoIR_zrojI0ubRDlzLZYN6hAkndMH1ILdO6o924wAnUCKraZDpFuEj6ppkSU4BXGIONMo7jMI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1227.24)):

I know there's a 12 year old sitting at my house who would love a Mr. Beast burger, because all I hear about is Mr. Beast and how he bought every -

Riley Lagesen ([20:38](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=yc6zHV3QADT00RLVSV508MLy7EP_5xSP1PEppSg0KYv5A6w0P5kuqlzXt1MkGXCXY-FMHcfkdvari-4liRmqJ7_PPN4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1238.34)):

It will not be hard for you to find, because we have a great client in your neighborhood who is a Mr. Beast partner who's selling them through their restaurants. So you could support a couple of folks at once. And really interesting to see how the virtual space ... I mean there's a number of different relationships within each virtual brand, especially when you're dealing with third parties. The level of collaboration and the contractual relationships behind these, it's pretty fascinating how much complexity there is between getting the Mr. Beast delivered to your family and to your 12 year old to kind of everything else in the chain that's making it happen.

Justin Prochnow ([21:20](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=AZg-z9pSjbWvDZEfkvskNjN42VzMPc75_fhqWUcIFADV5NYdrhV9b1eD26LjsfTb2-7172dWr9l3bttg_VoirlcRXlk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1280.64)):

Sure.

Riley Lagesen ([21:20](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=F3TU-Gf-be8JviuQr-iH2O7HwgH6tahHPaZkuiFEZWvGqyJ-8JAadD-SR2VNXZ7mQc2aUz-Ktc00tTynR7fHRO-S_6A&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1280.82)):

So it's really a dynamic space.

Justin Prochnow ([21:23](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=Ow6W-nizcis7t-WOgmHIzZ_YRYvt1_JV5IjvWWXmJMY332SDLU5Cbdif8iAw8PcaWqnwUzeEqKZjiTMyZYHhAXxIL6E&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1283.16)):

Well, I get the, "Dad, you got to see this. He bought every item in the dollar store," or, " He bought every car on the parking lot and gave them away to people." So we'll have to look into that. I think the other area that certainly I worked with some restaurants on was also converting to some consumer packaged goods on items from the restaurant as well. I know we talked about I do a fair amount of work for Milk Bar, who, of course during COVID, along with the Momofuku restaurants, were shut down, but -

Fuku restaurants were shut down, but Milk Bar had started selling their cookies and crumb cake and then ice cream as consumer goods that you can now buy in Whole Foods and Target and other places. And that provided another avenue of revenue while the main brick and mortar locations were shut down. So in the same way that you're talking about some of these virtual things moving to some consumer package goods was another way that restaurants could kind of get another area of revenue.

Riley Lagesen ([22:40](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=MsT_HTpPHBrnhSZvRxaeMwmyxWtwbtHaGBgMCUx4gtfNUqr7Nfdmp7VRyDgLIzqGKbqqgCqLflDmmBprRIbC1yBLD7I&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1360.65)):

Yeah. You're right. And there's been a lot of our clients that have been in the CPG space for some time, whether self-producing or working with license manufacturing and distribution partners, it's definitely an area that's, I think, of greater interest for a lot of groups. COVID, I think, accelerated that interest and an exciting platform for brands to diversify their sales platforms.

Justin Prochnow ([23:09](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=r3vpEfgoS4W2-xAjSsDqHoIoGEUAONJ29vys4BMScJHZOCB5XvQJj1uOgCvVxZTPJN8EiC1KWsbfAyGA08sKnvJSajs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1389.78)):

You and I are similar in another way in that we like to get out and do a lot of stuff in the industry, whether it's conferences and giving presentations or doing things like webinars and podcasts and things. And you've got some really interesting things, I know that you were involved in, was it a restaurant school or a academy, something of that nature?

Riley Lagesen ([23:37](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=PWs2UwMSXIuwGTgFIcGN3v-TYwJNVMiyhhgAc4bzGEzhUo9DdlsERSfdEv35K2Y2UqFK4z-QKJE5CPUwV9HN07_qbmE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1417.8)):

Yeah. I started doing my own conferences back when I was an associate attorney because I go to a lot of the restaurant conferences, while I enjoyed them, I found myself a little bored by the content. And a lot of it was so sponsor driven that it wasn't really as objective as it could be. So after a few years of doing some events with focus on round table interaction with key leaders and others I thought wouldn't be kind of fun to do an event based upon kind of a high school theme. Growing up in the 80s, there was a movie called Fast Times at Ridgemont High. I said, why don't I do fast times at Restaurant High and so that started out of a series of Restaurant High conferences.

So for the first one, I called up Judge Reinhold who played Brad in the movie from All-American Burger, he was our first honorary principle. And so he came out. It was a really fun addition to the program. And we had about 60 different topics that are led by leaders that really know what they're doing, everything from finance to employment, real estate and IP, and it really caught on and then did Game Time at Restaurant High in San Francisco with Guy Fieri and Joe Montana as our special honorary principal. Then did one in Los Angeles the following year, was a music theme one. So Mark McGrath from Sugar Ray and Guy came again, and then we had our big after part of the Elon Musk and his brother Kimbal at the Edison.

And then we actually took over a real high school in Hollywood, Hollywood High and transformed it the world epicenter of restaurant job and food and beverage opportunity for students in 2015. Probably the most complex event that we've done taking over a public school with thousands of kids. But Terry Crews, the actor, was our honorary principal supported by a cast of all stars at a food fair with around 40 different brands. And then the sentiments in the US were a little testy after 2016, as you might imagine, election, people feeling kind of a little political hangover. And so did the United Taste of America in Washington DC and had multiple venues and thought, we'd try to bring some fun in comedy into that. And we were fortunate to have Bill Murray be our honorary vice president of the United Taste with his son, Homer, a restaurateur in Brooklyn as our president of the United Taste. So we had a terrific time raising awareness. We did a food and job fair with teens from schools around Washington, DC, with Congress and different brands from all over the country, including as far away from Hawaii, we flew in Ahi Tuna from MaryAnns to do their fish tacos. Several thousand miles to you to get the real tuna there and do their Ahi tacos.

We like to do things a little bit different. And I think one of the things about the Restaurant High events and the other things that we do is it's authentic. We look to provide value to clients, as much or more than we can. It's a very personal endeavor that we have to provide great service every single day, no matter what we do and we want to fulfill that promise. And, and when our clients work with us, we want them to know that they have a group that really has their back, that is out there working as hard as they can to be the best advisors that they can anywhere and that's what keeps us going every single day and part and parcel with the team here at GT.

Justin Prochnow ([27:17](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=ejUalHWKM7ELTetE6r71Rp0AVnURCvFU0AgxmX2EJrAxJtqCpXdkmAeyysAUOxEbFkBSJOpSDcYXi26JCvsoz2ZfLAo&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1637.79)):

Nothing like fresh Ahi tuna cut. I remember in particular industry event, SupplySide West in Las Vegas. And I have a client applied food sciences, that usually has a big party on one of the nights there at one of the restaurants in Mandalay Bay. And one of the times they had like a full huge tuna with the sushi chef just cutting it right off the fish there for you. There's just something about them cutting it right there in front of you that makes it even sweeter.

Riley Lagesen ([27:52](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=A-eA9TR2w6BFE2nrsYbG2XfSuNnsKzB6cRDTWNSJz_U6hPdC4xuxmCH5ia6vf3B-70nmGmMj7xMJiC39buhLuLNeTVs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1672.29)):

I know that the the waterways around Washington DC, they probably have great Ahi tuna swimming around there. But when you want to have that, you need to get it from the source. It was well worth it. That was one of the biggest line item expenses of our event and more than worth it.

Justin Prochnow ([28:08](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=q4pBCkewJUOHWCN9nxnTkYuo115eR5kv7mMb64RDzHaHdUlUSizumCtPkJGE3_pMH1YzoSJ7VZ6CiO8o7Qz_WF0JdWg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1688.64)):

It really seems like the restaurant industry is one that does rally around itself. Again, I listened to a number of podcasts. I listened to Dave Chang's podcast a lot, he was pretty vocal about supporting restaurants during COVID and wanting to make sure that the small restaurant didn't get killed because of it. And I know that with Guy Fieri and Terry Crews, there seems like some people that just really are very active and that you go to and can kind of call on time and time again for some of these industry wide type of initiatives that they always seem to be game for being a part of.

Riley Lagesen ([28:54](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=MefQrlK8zdL6IO3G2MjHLKmTLqSNweV-XxNPnCqF8dAJSTiDfJOLfqdiFUxeV0Cv5aSu3BrqzJ7ESZ1eFMIzzBVopM4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1734.54)):

Yeah. I think, the way I work and we work with the industry and our clients and people who care about it is, comes from a place of authenticity. We're not trying to sell anybody anything. This is an industry that we care about for all the right reasons. And for me personally, it's an industry that has given me more than I ever could have expected and the same goes for a lot of people, millions of people out there that really are in the industry today or have been in the industry and came out the better for their experience. So our job is to help protect those businesses and keep the pathway for opportunity open. And there's a lot of personalities out there that really feel strongly about good food, good jobs, and opportunity. We have a country that's as unhealthy as it ever has been both physical and mental health. Food, in our opinion, is the best medicine. It's often been stated way back to the ancient times that food is the medicine and that you have to be a healthy mind and healthy body to be at your best. And the food we've been eating for a very long time and how we've been marketed the food is not leading to that result. So there's a lot of people that are really motivated to do it in a way that's authentic, sincere, and commercially palatable and successful. Mixing commerce with fresh, healthful and delicious food it's a tricky balance to obtain, but there's a lot of great groups out there doing it. And that's what gets us really excited to work with folks that are making a better path through great food and great jobs.

Justin Prochnow ([30:39](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=HlLI1v2Lu3AB3wcw701pHSjMFLsfXTJZRWSt0gKlxgMAKRZPk90MghRG9REopzaVDYDW49Wv8Lo-WiPzWE67aBA4V3k&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1839.27)):

I know one of the things that attracted you to Greenberg was just we've got a lot of people in a lot of different areas and experts in a lot of different areas, whether it's Ed Chansky in Las Vegas, who's probably the leader in the country on sweepstakes and promotions and anything having to do with, I think, he calls it contest games, giveaways. I mean, he's the expert on that. And we got Jonathan Bing in New York, who's great on alcohol licensing. There's a lot of different people that you can pull from to help out your clients in the industry.

Riley Lagesen ([31:22](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=ut5tuzJGuKp9zVWBM9L3ugwyfeJLuurN4WY5kloI1MiIQeFIlE5QeC_D_t5urXJCux4ypfsV-O9WWKBRtT_DvHtf00g&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1882.05)):

Yeah. As an industry focused practice and with restaurants being, as I said earlier in the call, one of the most complex in terms of legal needs that are varied and diverse in which a lot of operators don't have access to quality council, that's the goal. Is to have a team that can provide informed, experienced, and efficient counsel to be a value add in clients in every area where they might need it. If we don't have it to have people outside of our firm, that we can refer to that can provide it.

And so joining Greenberg Traurig, being one of the largest law firms in the country with established practice groups in areas that matter most, in the geographic areas where most of our clients are or want to be it's the perfect fit for our group to join. So we've already worked with close to 150 or more teammates at GT since arriving and we only expect that number to increase substantially. Prior Firm that was around the number we'd work with every year, and hopefully involve 3 400 or more timekeepers and team members at GT on a go forward basis. So, it's a practice that really needs support from a lot of different practice areas and people, geographically and GT is the ideal place, in our opinion, to have this practice.

Justin Prochnow ([32:44](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=gsKKZ_6FnqUtFwSUYO-fulk1iKQMo6YNPCyUPt5u9wY_lxTPgXRtG3izhzNJjBxJx8UDYtkh6tQn6_tbTEghzVzrfBI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1964.1)):

Working mostly with companies in the restaurant industry, do you just go out to eat then every night? [inaudible 00:32:53] Do you ever make food yourself?

Riley Lagesen ([32:56](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=y_LiIdpuzg4SYAyYh3lzLlZnVXWbZShVyqOGGArKaEzNpNXGTgJdiL4_RuRt-cGral1cawXqs9LfDyhgkI1pygC3Azw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1976.43)):

Yeah. I'm pretty much a vegan, I say I haven't had dairy for over, I think, 40-

Say I haven't had dairy for over, I think 40 some years, I'm dating myself here, but yeah. And so my diet is very limited. So not as exciting. It's heavy Mediterranean. So when you mention hummus, I mean, and Mediterranean food, personal favorite, and there's some really great concepts we work with in that space that's really exciting and the clients we represent, most of them all have really exciting vegetarian or vegan or non meat options. I'm not opposed to meat as I was a mediator for a very long time. It took me almost 12 years from working with a client named Veggie Grill. Started in Los Angeles in 2008. I started working with when they introduced me to a book called the China Study, which I read.

And then after about a dozen years, everything finally sunk in and made the decision. So I've been meat free for over a couple years now. So a long way of saying, I don't have the dining kind of experiences that you might expect for practice, but I enjoy going to restaurants more than anything, and really enjoy the business of restaurants and the entrepreneurialism, and really love working with restaurant leaders and restaurant teams. And nothing's more exciting than that. And being able to enjoy the restaurants is obviously a huge thrill and perks of being in the business, but it's everything about it that gets it exciting for me and our team.

Justin Prochnow ([34:44](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=zB7YHh6NxwklyCesFvus0F4JHrjC10NvUaKacsECX0KbOQ6dE_n2GYlXEG6JyfVEPalFsTPrIzy_-rVKGrrSUR0eUVE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2084.82)):

I have news for you. You had already dated yourself by mentioning Fast Times at Ridgemont High, which is certainly in my wheelhouse also. But that clearly puts you in the growing up in the '80s category. So one of my personal favorites as well. Before we sign off here, any upcoming trends or things that you see that are new and exciting in the restaurant industry? I mean, you touched on it a little bit. The plant based alternatives is only going to continue to grow both in, again, in the finished package goods and in the restaurant industry. You have everything from Jack fruit that looks and has the same texture as barbacoa to cauliflower pizza. We have a client that has shrimp... Substance that looks just like shrimp, but made out of algae.

And we went to a food conference in April, in New York that was a New York-Israeli Food Bridge Conference and there were 12 startup companies from Israel that all were based on cellular grown meat and other types of plant based products. So, clearly that's one area of focus, but anything else on the horizon that we can look forward to?

Riley Lagesen ([36:18](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=8915hkEATQDjS_oY5w603Nlj5NE5R2wcC2drrQ6qLfFr69EvdW5xyFWnuK5cndn4wp3CtCRN2GML6vC_sXME_cKoveg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2178.36)):

Yeah, there's a lot to look forward to, a lot to be aware of. We're at a critical time, I think for the industry for how it's going to move forward, business- wise and how it's going to impact consumers and others that are connected to the industry. Say there's a lot of dynamic new companies that are creating new products and so forth, and a never ending array of interesting options that are available to consumers. I think the big question that we have to ask is a country that has not been asked or talked enough is really on good food access, which has been part of conversation here and there.

But as costs increase and the cost increases are spurred, not just by things like inflation and what have you, but wages have gone up dramatically. Occupancy costs are still very high. Product costs are obviously extremely high. It lends to prices that are obviously higher and the gap between those who can afford good food and those who cannot has grown wider and it's continued to grow even wider. And what that means in terms of our population and human health is not a good conclusion. What that means is that more people are going to be eating things that are not making them well, that are making them more susceptible to preventable illnesses and setting on a pattern that's really hard to reverse or get out of absent significant intervention and treatment and accessibility to the food that is better for them. And this is a trend that's been continuing for a very long time. We're seeing things go in very opposite directions. We're seeing political movements that are pushing unionization in restaurants.

The intent behind those that are behind these initiatives personally, I do not feel they are rooted in the best interests of business or the employees or consumers. And the result is going to be a lot more business closures, a lot higher prices and more accessibility problems. So that's the lens in which kind of looking at things from our end on a macro perspective and hoping that on the policy side, we can get the interest of some folks to really get behind this. And that's what we're working on in some of our initiatives. So I would say stay tuned for that. We're building a coalition of folks that believe in the stuff that we just talked about and hopefully make a significant impact in a short period of time, because there's no better time than the present. And it's been far too long that we've been going as a country in this direction.

Justin Prochnow ([39:05](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=AZ9XupzpAdcMAW2_MiQPwj4PfilM62E3X-2vQxBz9pwek1TflNLtEvj9MJXhT7IJ5Ock4CtPPjHJkoz33JlW2PJrqbY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2345.04)):

Well, thanks so much for joining us today. It's always good to catch up with you and to give our listeners a little more insight into now, not so new five plus months here, but a little insight into one of the other tangential areas here of our food beverage and agribusiness group and we appreciate you stopping by.

Riley Lagesen ([39:29](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=D83yuo5kgIUonrWQ3WosJT3idlVBT0BjODH3koCvL0jcVglkiquqiyrdjlRWm2ldf9V9YqXmqADv8Mgy8oB-WQgblcE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2369.43)):

Well, thank you so much, Jess. I really appreciate the kind invitation and the great work that you and your team does and love work with all of you and we're excited to be here at GT, obviously. So thank you again.

Justin Prochnow ([39:41](https://www.rev.com/tc-editor/Edit?token=BeEzJqbyerwyR61U0CPdv6NLmE2nUagKPwr_W29dBD-DPuw5u2Pcj88txX-tLdxyeKExFbdMURUB2SLeqHFWbPZh0dk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2381.25)):

Well, thanks everyone for listening. If you enjoyed it, please weigh in on your various app or platform where you listen, and we hope that you tune in next time. Thank you.