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Restaurant reporter gets blindsided by impromptu job interview

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The days when restaurant hiring largely consisted of flipping an apron at just about anyone who walked through the door are over, but Besito takes the process to a sophisticated, even scientific, level.

The polished-casual Mexican place has rented a storefront in **Westshore Plaza**, a brisk mall walk from where the restaurant space is being built out. Call it Recruitment Central. Besito is in a hurry to hire about a hundred qualified personnel, train them for 11 days [and open for business on March 25](#).

When I strolled through the door to interview a couple of the partners for this story, I did not know the tables would soon be turned, and that I would end up sitting for a mock job interview.

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Here's how it went:

Being a big-deal reporter and all, I skipped the online application, which is designed to get a sense of a candidate's experience, availability and suitability. [Andres Farfan](#), managing partner of the Tampa location — the first in Florida — said about 70 percent of online applicants move to the next step.

That involves a 20-minute online assessment test that measures attitude, aptitude and personality traits. (I was permitted to dispense with this level as well.) Farfan said about 70 percent of his thus-far 300 applicants have moved to the next level.

Which is where I started my interview — right there at Recruitment Central.

They started me with a kitchen staff test — despite my insistence that you'd never catch me working on a line — which measured dexterity and spatial skills.

The task: Assemble a nuts-and-bolts apparatus exactly as laid out, and do the same with a geometric shape made of Legos — alternating between the two in 30-second intervals.

My time: 3:30, an eternity compared to the record of 53 seconds, held by Farfan himself (in how many tries? I wondered). Candidates are permitted to take the test a second time, but I passed. Like I said — no kitchen work for me.

At another table were a series of folders earmarked for various front-of-house jobs. Owner/operator was taken, so I chose server. Farfan and [Stanley Goodman](#), a Besito partner in the Florida Region, administered a game they call Jeopardy.

From a series of printed pages, I chose one of three cryptically titled categories, and was subsequently asked a corresponding question. For "Inspire Me," they asked me to describe a supervisor or coach who had a profound impact on me, and why? I set my silver tongue to wagging, thinking: this is more my style. (Answers to both of those will remain confidential.)

I selected "Free Food For Tip," and was asked how I would handle a customer who requested gratis appetizers in exchange for a healthier gratuity. I paused, sensing that "How much we talkin'?" wasn't a good answer. I responded, role-playing now, by good-naturedly saying that I couldn't do that for them, but would certainly make up for it with excellent service.

My inquisitors liked my response.

At the end of the session, Goodman and Farfan told me I would definitely qualify as a viable server candidate.

The fact that I have an AARP card (it's here somewhere) did not matter, the two insisted. They're looking for diversity in their workforce — not just (my words) attractive young women.

While I found this difficult to swallow, they said the diversity approach works because Besito's demographic runs wide, roughly 21 to 65, and breaks out about 50/50 between men and women. Thus, um, seasoned individuals such as myself with the proper people skills could find a place on the Besito team.

That made me feel pretty darn good. But I'm still waiting on an offer.

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