

Michael Broadway: But what I did was –

Walter Blogoslawski: We got Hollywood.

MB: Yeah, Mike "Hollywood" Broadway.

WB: Yeah.

MB: What I did was I went to the Wildlife and Fishery in Louisiana. I asked him a simple question. I said, "Well, you let any – you had to be a culinary chef to be a cook. But you let any damn fool shuck oysters." He said, "Well, we had nobody to teach the class." Okay, so I have a shucking one-on-one DVD. You Google my name on YouTube. I have a training DVD on YouTube. I teach people how to shuck oysters. So, Hollywood Master, the shucking job presents the making up of a bad – Shucking 101 [laughter]. But that's what I do. I teach people safety. I teach people the difference between a good one and a bad one, how to store it, how to serve it, the temperature, and all this good stuff. But it's – like I tell people all the time, speed doesn't matter. It's about presentation. It's how it looks once you get it open. That's what's more important to me. Because I tell people when I'm shucking and while I'm shucking, I'm in a zone. My zone is me and my customers, serving them a good time, serving them the best Louisiana has to offer, and the best seafood, the best oyster shucking, the best oysters. You can't go wrong with that because people remember you and come back all the time. I mean, I got a phone call just the other day. The lady called me, and she said, "I haven't seen you since Hurricane Katrina." That was ten years ago. She said, "Well, all of a sudden, I just remembered how you – your style, the way you work, and why you work. I just had to call you and make sure you were all right." I'm like, "That was ten years ago." She said, "Yeah, but I – your name just kept popping up in my head." I said, "Because I'm a professional first." I said, "I do what I do because I enjoy doing it, not just because I get paid to do it. But I do what I do because I'm passing it on. Because I can't take it with me." For me, just to train people and show people how to do it properly and not to – and lose the fear of cutting your hand. I mean, just in the Oyster Festival – doing the Oyster Festival – doing the oyster-shucking contest, the guy standing right next to me had on a metal mesh glove. I'm standing there with a latex glove on, like, "Damn, you a bad man." [laughter] I'm like, "What are you doing with that glove?" He said, "Well, that's so I don't get cut." I said, "If you have to worry about cutting your hand, you shouldn't be shucking. You should be washing dishes." But like I say, you don't go to work. You go to work – you go there to practice so that you can be better at what you do. Because in your mindset, that's what you – it's not what got you in the business, it's why you are in the business. Because you want to bring the best of the best of the best, the best oysters, the best oyster shuckers, and representing the job where you work at, the people who you work with, the city that you work in. I mean, I did – I just got a reality show called the Best of the Best Oyster Shuckers in the Country. It was at the – in Boston at the Union Oyster Bar, the oldest oyster bar dating back to 1700. They asked me to represent the state of Louisiana. I'm like, "Do you know how many oyster shuckers they have in the state of Louisiana?" He said, "Yeah, but the president of the Restaurant Association of Louisiana told me to go look for Hollywood. Because he is going to make you look good." I said, "Okay." So, I went there, and I shucked the oysters. I did a reality show. I wasn't trying to win. I'm just trying to fill in the space to make the show go on.

WB: How did you get started in this?

MB: Well, somebody told me I couldn't do it.

WB: Is that right?

MB: Somebody – well, I passed by – there's an oyster bar on Bourbon Street called Desire Oyster Bar.

WB: Yeah.

MB: I passed by. I heard the guys having a good time. I looked in the window. I was like, "That looks like a fun job." So, I was working around the corner on the other street as a dishwasher. I said, "Well, first I've got to get my feet in the door." So, I got in there and asked the guy, "Are y'all hiring a busboy?" "Busboy?" I said, "Yeah. I'm going to be a busboy, so I can hang by the oyster bar." I'm telling myself in my mind, "I can hang by the oyster bar and just learn how to – teach myself how to shuck oysters." So, I taught my – every time the guy would put his knife down, I would pick it up and practice shucking. So, when the guy started complaining about me picking his knife and playing with his knife, I went and bought my own knife and an extra bag of band-aids. Every time I cut my hand, I know I'm not going to do that again. That hurt. So, I taught myself how to shuck oysters. One day the guy didn't show up, and I took his job. So, I told the guys, "The only way I'm taking this job as an oyster shucker is if I let my best friend come here and be – and take my job as a busboy, so I can teach him." And I've been teaching ever since. It's been almost forty years. Now everybody in the French Quarter – so, now, everybody walking past – going down to Bourbon Street is like, "Who taught you?" "Hollywood taught me." But they taught me – I taught them how to be a professional first. It doesn't matter how fast. You can be faster than greased lightning. But you cut it into a million little pieces; it's full of trash; it is dirty; it's defeating the purpose. If you've got anybody ask how you like your oysters, tell them clean and cold, the way Hollywood does. They say, "How do you shuck your oysters," say clean and cold, the way Hollywood does. That's what I do.

[talking simultaneously]

WB: We are speaking with Michael "Hollywood" Broadway, master shucker from New Orleans, Louisiana.

MB: Acme Oyster House.

WB: Acme Oyster House.

MB: Senior master shucker at Acme Oyster House.

WB: Yeah.

MB: Thirty-three years of service and just getting started. I go to practice every day. I go there to practice every day.

WB: The fishery service is trying to catch the –

[talking simultaneously]

I work for the fishery service, and we are trying to get the history –

MB: The history, you know, people don't understand that Louisiana oysters come out – these are mud oysters. These are farm-raised oysters.

[talking simultaneously]

I started in [19]75. With the industry, what they have to offer – the Louisiana oysters are raised in the mud. I'm hearing about a lot of these oysters coming out – these different oysters, they graze them in the bag. They furlong them in – fertilize them here and then bring them in there and let them grow. You tell me about the oysters that they let go of out of the mud and out the sand which makes the shell hard and all this kind of – but like I say, I call that job security. That's job security. Because I don't care how you grow them. As long as you bring it to me, it's an oyster. And for me to have to open – to be able to open anything that you bring through that door, that's a challenge for me. Because I'm teaching myself how to open anything that you bring. Well, the presentation is about everything.

[end of transcript]