Twitter Thread by Justin Logan



Justin Logan
@JustinTLogan

Rare sappy personal thread. Four years ago today, I opened a restaurant, a dream I had had for years. Two years ago today, I closed that restaurant. I've just been accumulating thoughts since then, so here they are. 1/

My first thought is of my wife and sons. I regret the stress I put them through. I worked 70+ hours a week for about three years. My wife supported our family and my youngest was born just before the restaurant opened. I missed out on so many memories of his development. 2/

I got home between twelve and three o'clock any given night, and I think I can count on one hand the number of times I couldn't answer the bell at six or six-thirty. I knew we had obligations, and we mostly met them, but meeting them took a toll on me. On my wife more than me. 3/

I never knew there was a "first year twenty." I learned later that restaurateurs joke that you lose 20 lbs the first year opening your new place. I was lean when we started, so I wound up severely underweight. I am 6'3" and at the peak of it all I weighed just under 170 lbs. 4/

My motto in taking care of my employees was "the house always eats last." It was a good metaphor, but I hardly ever ate. I drank. I knew the wakeup call was coming in a few hours, and I needed to decompress from the mania of the floor. 5/

I was on my feet the better part of every day. Deliveries: Wine cases, upstairs, downstairs. After the last guest had gone, I would start drinking. Employees would finish up and leave, I handled payouts, no problem. Around 1 or 2 I would start goosing my dish guy to finish up. 6/

I had so many friends, not-friends, former colleagues, and other people who came to support us. I liked to think we had a good spot, but I remember feeling guilty that they paid us for what we did. I remember each and every one of you who came. EVERY ONE. Thank you. 7/

I also had a lot of friends, people I thought were friends, etc, who I thought surely would come at some point, across two years. They never did. Maybe they were at Diplomate for the 50th time. Ubers were like $8 back then. I remember every one of you, too. 8/

When I think how badly my family and I were suffering then, losing lots of money, missing Dad, I think about those who are suffering now. Lots of restaurants failing now were failing then, and would be failing now regardless. But that doesn't diminish my sympathy. 9/

To a large extent, restaurants "waltz before a blind audience." I've always been mildly anti-democratic, but the public knows little of good food or wine. That is getting worse. The restaurant business is now, or was then, anyway, about who has the best Instagram wall. 10/

I came to believe that my little slice of the industry was doomed. Part of it was oversaturation, but labor cost, rent costs, the assault on the tip-credit system all contributed. My kind of restaurant was doomed: full-service spots that aren't fancy. 11/

What will remain? "Fast casual," pizza, and $300 per diner prix fixe bougie places. Sure, some reasonably priced full-service places will survive, but think back to your experiences eating out in DC in 2016 and 2017. Remember that? That's gone. Maybe forever. 12/

I met more kind, industrious people who were dedicated to improving themselves in the restaurant business than I have in the rest of my life. I handed $5,000 cash to a woman I'd met a few weeks before and the overage came back 10 days later counted to the penny. 13/

Our first day, I set out with a huge number of people from varied backgrounds. I put together server station furniture with them. I helped arrange the dish pit with them. I helped set up the glass wash station at the bar with them. I hope in some sense they're my people. 14/

To my former employees, immigrant and otherwise, and above all my family, I love you. We put out a good product with good service. I cherish every one of you. For the rest of you: if you're still reading: go get carryout from your favorite spot. Tonight. They need help. 15/15