



# Dina Sarhan and Amr El-Husseini

(Managing Partners • Dina Sarhan Culinary Solutions)

By Marwa Helal

**B**HOW HQ KRWQI WKHU RZ Q WCHMIRQ show, giving cooking classes and providing a one-of-a-kind restaurant consulting practice that recently expanded beyond Egypt, how does this couple make it work in the kitchen, on stage and within their own home? Dina Sarhan and Amr El-Husseini, of Dina Sarhan Culinary Solutions, dish out how they manage as partners in life and business. Edited excerpts:

Dina: The beauty of having your own business is that it's not a typical business in any way. We don't have a typical 8 to 5 workday, which is excellent. I don't have to show up at the office everyday and if I want to take a day off, I take it. But I'm a bit of a control freak, so I like to come to the office every day to see that the system is running smoothly even if we don't have work. For me, the system is the cleaning, the order, the handling of anything coming in whether it's purchasing, the storeroom or the chef's training kitchen.

A typical day begins in the office, which is actually a kitchen. When we started this business, the contractor and everyone working on creating the office space wanted to know what this place would be. The kitchen is where I work; it's like my lab. And we have the dining table for meetings.

If we have a meeting that requires both of us to attend, we start with that. Amr will be preparing his business plan and drawing figures and then we'll begin the meeting. If I have a morning class, I will come in two hours earlier to prepare for the class, teach the class and then I need two more hours to clean up afterwards.

We never overlap jobs and we never accept two startup jobs at the same time. If we're shooting 30 to 40 episodes for the cooking show, we clear two or three weeks just for the shooting then we go back to our normal schedule.

Amr: There is a to-do list when there are pending items such as the website, which is currently under construction, or bigger, long-term projects for which we don't really need a list. We delegate certain tasks to each other or to someone working with us and just do it.

Dina: We love everything we do and our children are definitely the most important part of our lives. As a result they have become very involved in our business. If one of us has to work alone or late, the other takes the kids home.

Sometimes we're not in the mood to play, but whenever there's a holiday, we're completely with them. We shut down, there's no business — whether it's a long weekend or a week. And when we're working they understand.

I'm not into having tons of people help-

ing. Whenever you find a troop of people like this in your home, you know nothing will get done.

I'm a very practical person and learned early on to do everything myself; when you delegate, you never get the result that you want.

Amr: When we design a course and before we teach it, we've done the recipe many times including identifying where to buy the ingredients and how to wash, prepare, cut and cook them. We have three and a half hours for every session and the sessions are designed to give room for questions along with the instruction.

When we design any menu we make sure that the operation is not heavy on the kitchen, meaning that there aren't a lot of assets thrown into the kitchen to produce this recipe. We thereby try to minimize investments. We are always trying to find the optimum solution for our clients.

It took us some time to figure out who would handle what and a lot of tasks are still intertwined because we're a small team. This is the most challenging part for people who are partners in life and business.

Dina: Sometimes it's an emotional roller coaster. I'm not always balanced. It's one thing to be passionate about what you're doing, but when it's a business, it has to work and it has to work correctly, all while taking risks and planning for the future — especially when it's a family business.

As an entrepreneur, you have to have a unique idea that you believe in. We've been knocked down many times so you really have to persevere, and the key to perseverance is to believe that you are doing something right. Like cooking, it takes practice. When you do something and it fails, I tell my students I only learn from my mistakes and sometimes mistakes turn into good things.

We are two people with two different minds and two different approaches, so we clash sometimes. We learned the hard way that to keep our peace and our lives on the right track — without ruining everything else — we need to keep some aspects of the business completely separate. And I'm not saying we've mastered this, we're still trying, and it's an ongoing process... **bt**

