

A woman with short grey hair, wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt and white capri pants, is captured in a tai chi pose. She is standing on a grassy hill, with her left leg lifted and bent, and her arms extended forward in a balanced position. To her left is a slender tree with green foliage. The background is a clear, bright sky.

SEIZE THE YEAR

By Lindsey Getz

*On the heels of 2010, it's time to
reinvent your professional self.*

*Whatever your penchant, try
something new this coming year—
like hosting a webinar
or learning to love tai chi.*

A large, bold, orange letter 'T' graphic that serves as a drop cap for the first paragraph of the text.

he new year is just around the corner, and it is the perfect opportunity to discover ways you can grow your business and enhance your knowledge. Just as we helped prepare you for 2010, we've rounded up RDs' top suggestions for expanding your professional horizons in 2011. Some of these ideas may require you to step outside your comfort zone, but each has the potential to positively impact your business. So unwrap your 2011 calendar and pen in this to-do list.

Henderson suggests, "Have a rule that eating is something you do while sitting down at a table in the kitchen, in the break room, or at a picnic table—in other words, somewhere designed for eating. You'd be surprised how much mindless eating you cut out. Plus, you'll actually notice and enjoy your food."

8. Mindless Grocery Shopping

Mindless eating can also hinge on how people shop for food. "Grocery shopping without a plan or list or while hungry or tired is a problem," says Henderson. "Without a plan in this situation, we are vulnerable to marketing and product placement and tend to bring home more unhealthy foods. Once they are in the house, the battle is lost. If you don't want it to be part of the family's regular diet, don't bring it home in the first place."

Henderson suggests that if people want to enjoy a specific treat with their family, they should bring home only the amount they want their family to eat and leave it at that. Families might also go out for their special treat so they're not stuck with leftovers that need to be polished off.

"That way, intake of the less-nutritious foods are at least a planned event rather than mindless snacking," Henderson explains.

9. Club Store Binges

Many people are attracted to club stores for their reasonable prices; doing the math proves that the price per serving is a great bargain. Unfortunately, those large bins, boxes, bags, and crates of food can end up prompting mindless eating. It's hard for people to stop at a 1-oz serving of chips when faced with a mammoth-sized bag. And when their freezer is jam-packed with unhealthful meal items, who's to notice how many they eat each week?

Wansink has observed a phenomenon that occurs when people have a large volume of one particular food on hand: They have a desire to use it up, even if they don't really like it.

Retelny adds, "As if the large-sized purchases at warehouse stores aren't enough, you sample food while you shop and before leaving are enticed by a food court laden with high-fat, sodium-laden, sugary treats on the way out of the store—another opportunity to eat!"

Wansink suggests people who shop at club stores individually portion the items for storage as soon as they get home so they won't be tempted to sit down with gigantic bags of food.

10. Appetizer Overload

People may find it hard to resist a sample of food when they're waiting for dinner. That's why Retelny singles out free appetizers at restaurant tables, such as chips or bread and olive oil, as a tempting mindless eating trap. This can even occur when people are dining at a friend's house; they might find it hard to resist those cheese trays and hummus and pita bread

platters when they're mindlessly eating while socializing. By avoiding the chip bowl or bread basket when dining out and positioning themselves farther from the appetizer tray at social events, your clients can better avoid this mindless eating pitfall.

The Work Ahead

There's more work to be done to change society's eating environment and behavior. But Painter says that people should start by working on their own eating environment first. "If you change your diet environment, you will eat less. We can change our own microcosm, whatever we can control so that food is not everywhere," stresses Painter.

"One strategy can be to get people outraged about the unhealthy environment, which can prompt them to advocate for broad change," adds Henderson.

Many schools are calling out for positive change where nutrition is concerned. "We have met with some success in cleaning up the food environment in some schools, although we still have a long way to go. There is recent interest in ensuring that the childcare environment is a safe haven with respect to nutrition, and that is a good thing. However, the larger environment continues to facilitate overconsumption of unhealthy foods," says Henderson.

Wansink challenges RDs to "start helping schools get healthier. It shouldn't be that [children] can never have the things they like because then they wouldn't eat school lunch. But we can keep nudging them to eat the healthier stuff." In particular, Wansink urges for smarter lunchrooms. For example, he reports his findings that if you put fruit in a nice bowl, turn on a light, and make kids walk past it, you can increase fruit sales by 101%. (Readers can visit www.smarterlunchrooms.org for more mindless eating tips for the school lunch program.)

The knowledge base on mindless eating can also move in a more positive direction. Painter says, "That's the next step. We need people to start eating more of the good things. As long as we understand what makes us eat more, we can understand how to eat more fruits and vegetables. You can decrease obesity by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. That's where dietitians can come in and do some fun and interesting things." For instance, "Take the Eagles Challenge" invites people to dine at Eagles Deli & Restaurant in Boston, one of the country's most famous "pig-out" restaurants, and exercise appropriate portion control.

In a world of mindless eating traps, dietitians certainly have their jobs cut out for them. But perhaps by recognizing the most pervasive land mines, they can help clients learn how to sidestep them and begin to eat more mindfully.

— Sharon Palmer, RD, is a contributing editor at *Today's Dietitian* and a freelance food and nutrition writer in southern California.

January

Work on Your Website

You've likely read some of our articles about getting accustomed to the Web for the benefit of your business, but many professionals are still taking the old-school route and marketing in the Yellow Pages or banking on word-of-mouth referrals. This new year, grab the bull by the horns and get your site in gear. It will pay off.

"By setting yourself apart with a professional and carefully designed website, you tell a potential client that you care, operate on a professional level, and take yourself seriously," says Kristin Reisinger, MS, RD, CSSD. "If an RD is going to invest time into their academics and education with the hopes of having a successful career, they should then invest as much time into building their business. That starts with marketing."

Reisinger says making yourself "findable" on the Internet can also foster opportunities with the media and help attract new clientele. Individuals looking for a service typically search online. Reisinger suggests shopping around for a good website developer and says it's important to take the time to review his or her past work. Find someone who can bring your vision to life. "Spend the money on the most qualified person," she adds. "It's an investment in your career."

February

Embrace Social Media

Constance Brown-Riggs, MEd, RD, CDE, CDN, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association (ADA) and author of *The African American Guide to Living Well With Diabetes*, says joining the conversation with

other RDs and patients means getting involved with social media. Many dietitians aren't using social media in their business and marketing plans. Maybe you have a Facebook page or even a blog for fun, but if you're not using it for business, you're missing out on a great opportunity.

Brown-Riggs recommends social media newbies take a course such as "Blogging for Passion and Profit" with Jane Boursaw. She says it will allow RDs to "dip their toes in and see how it feels."

"The skills learned in this course and the networking involved is invaluable," she continues. "When I took the class, which Jane started as a listserv, I was so impressed to find well-known, seasoned writers were in my class—proof there is so much more to blogging than writing content. Taking this course was one of the best investments of time and money I ever made."

Visit www.blogging-for-passion-and-profit.com for more information.



March

Get Your Name Out There

Using social media and creating a website for your practice are two effective ways to get your name out there, but there are many more tactics to consider. Take this month to focus on expanding your reach, whether that means getting more involved in the community, developing a lecture, or writing an article. The latter has benefited Leslie Bonci, MPH, RD, CSSD, LDN, director of sports nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "Getting an article published is one of the best ways to publicize yourself as well as the importance of the RD," she says. "If 5,000 people read what you have written and you get 1% of those people to call you, that's potential revenue for little to no investment. Not bad, right?"

Rick Hall, MS, RD, a senior lecturer at Arizona State University, says writing a letter to the editor of a major newspaper is on his own 2011 to-do list. He has already written a letter to the editor of a medical journal that was published. "The biggest benefit, in my opinion, is to benefit the profession," he says. "Writing a letter to the editor of a magazine, journal, or newsletter has the potential to demonstrate the point of view of a registered dietitian. The more we sign our name in print as 'registered dietitian,' the better. There are many issues that need our unique perspective, and the public needs to hear from us."

April

Let Your Sneakers Do the Talking

Spring has sprung and that means flowers are blooming and various outdoor organized runs—for charity or fun—are cropping up. Running or walking in a 5K is a great way to set a good example for your clientele.

"Whether it's a diabetic patient or someone looking to lose 20 lbs, increasing physical activity can only benefit the majority of our clients, and that begins with being a good role model," says Reisinger, who is also a fitness trainer. "A 5K is something simple that everyone can aspire to, and most people we work with could benefit from the level of achievement, dedication, and improvement that comes in fitness training for a 5K."

Reisinger says those who have never run a 5K should follow what she calls a "Couch to 5K" program to get started. Begin with smaller runs and build up to the 3.1 miles that encompass this race. More advanced runners should map out a 5K route to determine their capabilities, she suggests. She recommends using www.mapmyrun.com.

"Remember to start out slow and keep a steady pace," she advises. "Many people just starting out get frustrated by pushing themselves too hard too soon."

May

Don't Be Afraid to Do Double Duty

Being a mom doesn't mean you can't also be a professional, and vice versa. In honor of Mother's Day, this month's suggestion is geared toward RD moms. Sarah Krieger, MPH, RD, LDN, consultant and instructor for Fit4AllKids and mother of three young children, says she wants other RD moms to realize they can find a way to do it all—if doing it all is what they want.

Krieger had her third child in 2009 and decided in 2010 to stay home and work in the evenings and on weekends. "I love that I can do what I love—teach weight management classes to families of overweight children as well as do consulting—while the baby naps in my home without the client having to know," she says. "I also do media work, pediatric clinical on the weekends, and am a personal chef per diem—when I want to be. All of this can be done without impacting my children's schedules. Yes, it takes a ton of energy, but it keeps RD mothers

connected to their profession while still raising a family."

For other RD moms who choose to stay at home, Krieger suggests getting involved with the local dietetics association to network and obtain continuing education credits. "I was president-elect when I was pregnant with our third baby and president of our local district during his infancy," she says. "I did board meetings after bedtimes, lots of online communication, and scheduled weekend and online meetings to fit our district's needs. It's taught me that anything is possible with dietetics and not to be afraid to think outside the box."



June

Take Up Tai Chi

Doing tai chi, the ancient Chinese form of movement meditation that combines breathing and relaxation techniques with slow, deliberate movements, is a great way to relax after a busy day with clients. It's also an activity you might consider recommending to your clients. A University of Florida study found that a regular tai chi exercise program may help lower blood glucose levels, allowing people with diabetes to better control the disease. But before recommending it to a patient, try it for yourself.

"Tai chi has held my interest for nine years," says Diane S. Graves, MPH, RD, LD, CLT, owner of No Nonsense Nutrition

in Austin, Tex. "There is always something new to learn, refinements and discoveries to make, and a fantastic sense of community."

Graves says practicing tai chi could truly benefit other RDs. "As scientifically trained healthcare professionals, we spend a lot of time using our heads and many of us exercise regularly," she says. "For most people, however, there is a disconnect between the mind and the body. Tai chi requires that we combine the mind and body with the ultimate effect of creating a sense of internal connection. The healthier we are in this respect—inner and outer selves connected—the more holistically we can assess and take care of our clients."

July

Shadow a Health Food Store Clerk

Like it or not, many people get their nutrition advice from a vitamin or local health food store employee when they buy their supplements. Molly Kimball, RD, CSSD, a nutrition writer, speaker, and consultant, believes it would behoove RDs to spend some time—whether it be a day or a few hours—with a local health food store clerk.

"They are hearing and seeing everything that's going on with the general public and have their finger on the pulse of what people are looking for," she says. "The more we know about the different products on the market, the more valuable we are to our clients and the more they perceive us as the go-to nutrition experts."

Kimball says meeting with your local health food store or supplement supplier is also a great way to establish a relationship that could lead to referrals, and it can alert RDs as to which supplement side effects need to be on their radar.

August

Host a Webinar

Hosting a webinar on a timely nutrition topic is a great way to expand your reach beyond clients you see in your own office, suggests Erin Palinski, RD, LDN, CDN, CPT, owner of Vernon Nutrition Center. "It's also a great way to market your practice, increase your Web presence, and build a group of online followers," she says. "Make sure you advertise your webinar through your client e-mail list, Twitter postings, and Facebook page to increase attendance and exposure."

Palinski says hosting a webinar that anyone can attend, no matter where they live, can stretch your influence and marketing beyond your brick-and-mortar office space. "You can reach family and friends of current patients and build social media followers who will visit your blog, all of which will help expand your business online. I have also found [webinars] to be a terrific marketing tool for getting past patients back in the door," she notes.

September

Help Schools Help Children

Recognizing that September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month—and back-to-school time for most kids—consider doing your part to encourage your local school district to opt for more healthful meals. Barbara Baron, MS, RD, CDN, spokesperson for the National Dairy Council, says it's important not to overlook the fact that while the childhood obesity epidemic is growing, many children and adolescents are undernourished and not getting the recommended amount of key vitamins and minerals they need for growth. The National Dairy Council recently partnered with the National Football League to launch Fuel Up to Play 60, a program that empowers youths to take action to improve nutrition and physical activity at their school.

"Registered dietitians can help schools utilize the skills of local RDs by visiting www.fueluptoplay60.com and entering their zip [code] to see what schools in the area are participating," suggests Baron. "They will then receive e-mails on what's happening in their area as well as ways to volunteer and lend their support."

October

Celebrate Food and Improve Your Cooking Skills

You may think you're a master in the kitchen, but everyone has something to learn. Take a cooking class or buy a cookbook and try some new recipes this month, suggests Manuel Villacorta, MS, RD, CSSD, creator of the Eating Free program for weight management and an ADA spokesperson. "Enjoy preparing meals and eating them and start celebrating food," he continues. "Dietitians are in the forefront, talking to people about nutrition, weight loss, and health. Eating and cooking meals have become a chore for many, and RDs need to be role models."

Having moved from his home in Lima, Peru, to the United States, Villacorta says he experienced some shock concerning a very different culture of food in America. "For discipline's sake," he says, "I wasn't supposed to eat when I was hungry" but instead at more strictly scheduled mealtimes. Also, "Empty refrigerators and convenience stores, sandwich shops, cafés, and restaurants were shockingly common fare. No longer was going out to eat a celebration, but rather cooking was a special event."

Villacorta wants all of that to change and hopes others will follow his dream of embracing chopping, slicing, cooking, smelling, tasting, and savoring foods. He says his own cooking has helped his practice by giving him great ideas to suggest to clients.



"People are bored from hearing that baby carrots and celery are a great snack," he says. "Flavor it up! Make it fun and your clients will love you and make your practice successful."

November

Subscribe to More Magazines

As the end of the year approaches, now might be a good time to work some new magazine subscriptions into next year's budget. Seek out the magazines your clients are likely reading, suggests Kimball, who each month makes a point to flip through the latest magazines, scanning the headlines and sidebars or boxes of information. "If there's something that stands out to me, either something that's new or gives me an idea, I tear it out and keep it on file," she says. "RDs may already know much of what's in these publications, but almost inevitably there will be at least one new topic or area that he or she can learn something from."

Kimball also says reading what your clients read will help you better connect with them. "Sometimes we get so bogged down with more clinical thinking that we lose sight of some of the things our clients are interested in and want to learn more about," she says.

December

Help Build the Future

It's important to recognize that today's students are the future of the nutrition field and that you can greatly influence their career path by being a mentor or offering an internship program. Angela Ginn, RD, LDN, CDE, an ADA spokesperson, says in 2011 she'd like to see more RDs volunteer their time at the institution where they cultivated their knowledge. She visits students every year to discuss the opportunities in the profession and even developed a mentoring program for high school and undecided college students who are considering a food and nutrition career. She says RDs who do the same will find it is an opportunity to learn how to teach. And what you learn in terms of delivering information and knowledge may bolster your skills with clients. In addition, adds Ginn, "the relationship with eager students may also lead to a future intern."

Ginn also notes that giving back to students is quite rewarding. "I love seeing the excitement on young students' faces when you can help them put the puzzle of their dreams together," she says.

— Lindsey Getz is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pa.

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