

Buon Cibo

Mario and Luigi worked from five until ten, twice a day in a brand name hotel in San Diego. First, they worked from 5:00am until 10:00am making breakfast and then they worked secretly from 5:00pm until 10:00pm making take out for guests in the hotel and others. I need to explain.

Mario and Luigi were hired by the hotel to make breakfast for the guests in the hotel restaurant. More than just a continental buffet you see in those chains, but less than a full-service restaurant you see in the finer hotels. No, the hotel only served breakfast from 6:00am until 9:00am. After breakfast, a maid came in to clean the kitchen for the next day.

But Mario and Luigi, like so many hard-working people, had to work second jobs to provide for their family. At first, they tried ride sharing, but the competition from Uber and Lyft make this time not worthwhile. They tried working in other restaurants, but the pay wasn't enough and the hours weren't steady.

They asked the hotel manager if she could keep the restaurant open for lunch, but they were denied. Something about insurance costs, regulations, and local tax issues.

One day, Mario and Luigi were having lunch together. "Luigi, I can't make ends meet. My wife is expecting another baby and will have to leave her job."

"Same here Mario. My wife's company is moving out of town and they are letting her go. What are we going to do?"

"You know. The kitchen is just sitting there most of the day and night."

"Yes, it is."

"What if we were to cook take out for the guests at night and deliver to their rooms?"

“I don’t think the manager would let us.”

“Well, we wouldn’t tell her.”

“Mario, the guests would let that out. We would be fired.”

“No Luigi. I mean it wouldn’t be for service in the hotel. We could put flyers in the rooms as if we were a local pizza place and offer delivery. Then we cook the food in the kitchen and deliver it to the rooms. The guests wouldn’t know the food was prepared here. We could finish at 10:00pm, clean up and still have time to sleep before coming back to start breakfast.”

“Mario, you’re a genius. Let’s try it.”

So, Mario and Luigi created flyers for pizza and pasta dishes and slipped them under the guest doors in the afternoon. The phone numbers were their cell phones and they didn’t put an address for the restaurant on the flyer. They called their business ‘*Buon Cibo*’ which means good food. Luigi’s cousin Tony delivered the food, hot and ready to the rooms. Guests didn’t always want to go out for dinner after a long day sightseeing and walking the wonderful beaches.

The first week was slow, as expected. Only nine orders in a hotel with 100 rooms. But the second week it jumped to 24 orders, then 51 and an all-time high of 72 one stormy night. Bad weather is a key factor in all take out businesses.

Then they started to get requests. Making pizza and pasta was manageable, but people started asking for salads, drinks and even Mexican food too.

“Oy vey Luigi. I didn’t think this would happen.”

“Good grief indeed Mario. We can’t handle that many foods, not to mention the added costs for supplies and where to put leftovers.”

“But we’re committed now. What if a guest started making inquiries to management?”

“Or tried to find our location, maybe calling the city to check on our license?”

“Should we just close up, like some local business shutting down?”

“That would raise as much suspicion as serving more foods.”

“Maybe we could outsource the orders for Mexican food.”

“You mean get take out from another restaurant and say it was from ours?”

“You’re forgetting we don’t have a restaurant.”

“Oh yeah.”

“Well, we have to do something. People are starting to think we have this great place to eat. I saw us listed on Yelp and Twitter today.”

“All right. We’ll put a few Mexican items on the menu and see how it goes. We won’t make any profit but at least our customers will be happy.”

The next day, the *Buon Cibo* flyers included tacos and burritos, just three of each. Mario and Luigi had no idea what they were in for.

Once they offered tacos and burritos, the orders transitioned from Italian to Mexican. Within two weeks, 75% of the orders were for Mexican and only 25% for pizza and pasta. Their end of week profits were down 200% because they couldn’t resell the Mexican food for more than they bought it for.

“Maybe we need to drop the Mexican food Luigi.”

“And working two jobs, seven days a week is getting to be too much Mario.”

The next day after breakfast, the manager called Mario and Luigi into her office.

“Boys, you do a great job at breakfast, but I’m hearing about guests ordering delivery from a restaurant called *Buon Cibo*. Know anything about them?”

“No ma’am. Where are they located?” Luigi cringed when he heard Mario.

“Don’t know. But I was thinking. Why should we provide customers for some local takeout place when we can control the profits from our guests?”

“Why indeed.”

“So, I would like you to consider coming back in to the hotel in the late afternoon and preparing some dinner foods. I could cover the cost of supplies and pay you double what you are making now for breakfast.”

Mario and Luigi nodded to each other. “That sounds great. We could do that.”

“Then it’s a deal. Give me a list of supplies and you can start next week. I’ll promote it with the front desk and make some flyers to put in the guest rooms.”

“Thank you, ma’am. We won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t boys. And by the way, let’s make this a Mexican menu. You know, tacos, burritos, maybe some tostadas.”

“Don’t you think the guests would like Italian, pizza and pasta?”

“I don’t think we could compete with *Buon Cibo*. Have you seen their reviews on Yelp and Twitter?”

“No ma’am.”