



Foyso Choudhury MBE MSP

The first Bangladeshi-origin Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for the Lothian region.

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Lothian's first minority ethnic MSP Foyso Choudhury MBE has been involved in the restaurant business since 1990, but the business has been in the family since the 80's. Growing up he used to help and naturally began to enjoy as well as show a keen interest in the field. He was always interested in Politics and the restaurant was the place for conversations, discussions and meetings. The restaurant became a meeting place not just to socialise, and talk about ideas but share visions and find new ways to do business and new technologies and techniques to discover. For him, it wasn't just a business but a way of life.

His favourite part of this business is meeting new people. Over the years it developed his confidence as he had to socialise and meet all kinds of people and he enjoyed it very much. It made him realise he enjoys helping people and being an active member of the community not just a business owner. The business helped improve his communication skills which allowed him to do charity events, help those in need as he had the skills and expertise to do so as well as arrange fundraising for many causes. And in 2004, he was made an MBE for his fundraising and charity work. The restaurant was never just a restaurant for him but a place where he grew as a person and gained many skills which have made him the person he is today. He has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for the Lothian region since May 2021.

In choosing menu and ingredients, he discusses this with his chefs and together they brainstorm and research new dishes and ingredients. Their signature dish, Foyso confirms, is, "the Jalfrezi because it's traditional and tasty and one of my favourites. We want to keep the food authentic, fresh and true to its roots, so it's important for us to produce these to the best of our abilities rather than losing them by changing or evolving them into something else."

The staff in his restaurant are all trained and he tries to ensure they are happy to be part of the business and have a passion for the industry. They are aware of maintaining good standards and excellent customer service. Foyso loves what he does and hopefully they see that and are inspired to enjoy the work and always treat their customers with the utmost respect, care and attention.

They use social media for the businesses and try to interact with the public with promotions and advertising. "When everything's online you have to move with the times. We have modern equipment in the restaurants and ensure we are up to date with technology. Internet bookings and online services are a vital part of daily life now so we try to stay current and maintain a presence online," says Foyso.

Social media, he says, is good for reaching out to large numbers of people quickly. Before this they used local news to advertise the businesses. They can interact with people online now, take orders and bookings quicker. "So the internet is probably most useful tool for us," he says, "rather than posting out paper menus or leaflets to homes." They have a database of clients so they communicate with them with deals, events, and offers as well as help celebrate their special days such birthdays and other important days they may have. This allows them to not only build relationships with their customers but also keep them involved with the business.

"The biggest challenge to not only my business but majority of restaurants and businesses is the competition offered online by sites such as Groupon and other food sites which provide cheap alternatives," says Foyso. "I value quality over quantity and our food will always be the best we can offer and that won't be compromised. We also find that it's a challenge getting the best quality produce and spices for reasonable prices."

The hardest part of the job or being a manager, he says, is getting the right staff for the job. He finds this to be the toughest bit because he wants the person to be right for the job and keen as well as passionate and this can be difficult as not many young people especially ethnic minorities are choosing this as a career path.

The key ingredient to restaurant's success, according to him, has to be good tasty authentic food, reasonable prices and great customer service and standards. "We don't want to lose this industry, so more needs to be done to make it appealing and interesting to future generations. It's not just about food but skills, which need to be preserved."