

**A Letter to PUMA:**  
**On The Case for A Restaurant Industry Specific  
Shoe**

**Raven Gibson & Angelique Ribeiro**

**The Payroll Pumas Movement**

Raven Gibson & Angelique Ribeiro  
Payroll Pumas, Inc.



November 11th, 2021

Mr. Emory Jones



Dear Emory,

We would like to begin by sharing that we at the Payroll Pumas Movement have been developing an ethnographical study of the hospitality professional. Our team elected to zoom out of our current, individual professional perspectives and evaluate the state of the hospitality industry as a whole. Hospitality - being such a broad field - does leave a lot to consider. However, the lens that we have chosen, based on our range of expertise, is the lens of the restaurant worker.

With more than 30+ years of combined restaurant industry experience, at various levels, the Payroll Pumas team has developed a distinct and specific point of view. While watching our industry suffer at the hands of a global pandemic, our organization worked diligently to extract our years' worth of professional knowledge and employ it towards addressing the hospitality industry (more specifically the restaurant industry's) most critical challenges. Prompted by the strangely tumultuous time, an objective evaluation of our industry's condition revealed that the obstacles are not only massive, but overarching and interrelated. According to Bloomberg, with the pandemic beginning in March, by December of 2020 "more than 110,000 restaurants [had] closed permanently or long-term across the country" (1). From city closures to international supply chain difficulties, restaurants and hotels were swimming upstream versus a 20 foot wave.

The hardest pill to swallow was the simple fact that we could not, and cannot solve, everyone's problems. We can't increase the supply of plastic, or grow more livestock, or solve our workforce's labor issues. We did realize that we could, however, focus our resources and attention on the very life-force of our industry: the people that keep it running.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only exposed the many barriers that restaurant workers face, it also exacerbated them. Often lacking access to healthcare, underpaid, and highly susceptible to instances of substance abuse, the restaurant worker for many years represented what the past few years have aggressively illuminated. Economic status is an easy indicating metric. However, we believe the ultimate measure of life is health. Even without realizing it, what precedes our pursuit of the illusory "American Dream" is how necessary it is for an individual to be physically capable of the work that is required to realize the "American Dream".

General interest and concern surrounding mental health has increased as of late as well. From a purely physical standpoint, in the past year and a half, absolutely nothing has become more important than health. And for restaurant workers, we would be willing to argue from various perspectives, that nothing else has been more jeopardized.

This is where we see our opportunity for impact. How, during a global health crisis that has claimed the lives of thousands, and endangered millions more, do we help re-establish a sense of health among our professional community? At a time when individuals are prioritizing their personal health more than ever, how do we include one of the most high-risk demographics in our country in that restorative dialogue? In the first instance, we have to recognize something that was once understood to be a luxury, is simply a human right. Access to healthcare (and the other necessary resources for physical, mental, and financial wellness) is a human right. These concerns are abundantly visible here in Atlanta. And our travels to prominent culinary centers like Chicago, Charleston, and even Dallas indicated that the challenges our colleagues face are not remotely exclusive. In a country where millions of citizens are already underinsured, citing the “high cost of insurance as the main reason”, what change can we reasonably make to empower our working community towards a more equitable and sustainable model of personal and professional health (2)? And this, again, is just one of a plethora of layered barriers that our restaurant workers face.

Thinking ahead from there, the answer seemed simple, until it wasn't. Then, it was. We were able to firmly grasp that the one thing we can do is one thing we always have done. Our team moved to action - relying once again on our unrivaled hospitality skillset. In so many words, the word hospitality has to deal with the quality with which you receive, care for, and accommodate guests. Hospitality is one's ability to care for strangers essentially. As Senior General Manager at Good Food & Company, Ms. Angelique Ribeiro often tells us that “hospitality starts with how we treat each other”. With that in mind, the Payroll Pumas Movement did the same thing for the Atlanta Breakfast Club (ABC) team that they do for others day in and day out. We used our resources to receive and care for and accommodate those among us in a time when they needed it the most. Those resources varied in nature, but through a bit of creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration with designer Alexander John: the Atlanta Breakfast Club ABC Payroll Puma was born. Taking the shape of the classic Puma Suede silhouette, Alexander John envisioned three different, limited edition iterations that paid homage to the city's adored food concept. Viewers and guests from all over world, purchased pairs of the exclusive footwear. PUMA's assistance in securing that initial allocation of shoes established a new realm of possibility for our corps of artists. It was instantly a radical example of what creative people across industries (food, fashion, entertainment) could come together to create. The shoe was by no means the ultimate resolution, but it did open our eyes. And in a very stream of consciousness sort of way, we really began to wonder what does a shoe, of all things, have to do with the restaurants - much less the people that work in them.

Of course, there were several immediate and readily available points of synergy between the shoe and the restaurant. Over the course of the first few months of the pandemic, members of the Atlanta Breakfast Club team hosted a variety show entitled ABCTV inside of our newly shuttered dining room. This Instagram-based program provided a platform for us to raise awareness about the plight of our staff and promote the shoe - ultimately generating interest in

purchase and raising more funds. More importantly, however, the show shed a sort of hidden light on the ever-evolving, and prevailing power of hospitality as we know it. Hospitality is a form of entertainment. While our servers were unable to entertain our beloved guests in the manner we are/were are most accustomed to, we quickly seized an opportunity to be exactly who we are - even when our global health landscape begged us to forsake ourselves. For days on end, team members that generally work as hosts, servers, and cooks, picked up a microphone to represent themselves, their families, and our organization through the arts. We reverted back to the critical savviness that regularly equips us to disarm, engage, and inspire countless men, women, and children from around the world. We were profoundly reminded that through the unwavering strength of the team, Good Food & Company is home to the greatest food, service, hospitality, and entertainment experience in this country. We are hospitality professionals by occupation. We are artists and entertainers by craft, and by returning to that foundation, we created opportunities not only for our individual team members and families, but also our professional community at large.

In an effort to provide as much support as we could, we began/continued to think on other possible solutions. We became consumed by the intersections that we were exploring - even if unintentionally. It led us to recall places like Ellen's Stardust Diner in New York, where their "world-famous singing waitstaff are warming up their voices for you and all of Broadway" (3). There, the experience quite obviously extends beyond the highly performative delivery of food and beverage product into other avenues of actual performance. Every time a server goes to a new table, it's as if the curtain has come up for the first time and the play is beginning again. There is a noted advantage with Broadway being only blocks away from Ellen's Stardust Diner, but how does that translate to a market like Atlanta?

With the incredible influx of Atlanta's film and television industry in the last few years, parallels can absolutely be drawn. A 2016 New York Times piece written by Leah Rozen details how "while waiting for their big break, many performers put in time as waiters and at other food service jobs" (4). In places like Atlanta, where Tyler Perry recently opened a "330 acre... complete with 12 sound stage" studio complex, it is more than reasonable to anticipate the colliding of the not only the two industries, but also the labor force(s) (5). Even beyond that speculation, Rozen goes on to share that the specific "benefits to a restaurant or food-service job are many" (4). Among those advantages are "...tips, camaraderie with fellow wannabe actors... and flexible schedules that allow for auditioning and attending classes" (4).

From another standpoint, as recently as September of last year, it is reported that restaurants concepts are being opened and operated by entertainment personalities ranging from Tony Hawk (Chick N' Hawk) and Danny Trejo (Trejo's Tacos) to Ryan Gosling (Tagine) and Gloria and Emilio Estefan (Estefan Kitchen) (6). These, and countless other examples, demonstrate that not only is the restaurant industry a severely understated stage for the developing artist, but it also can be a means of expanding one's platform for even the most notable and accomplished creative entities. In either instance, the connection is more than palpable and potentially gives credence to the viability of a new strategy. And as the general bewilderment among our industry comrades grew, the Payroll Pumas team knew it would be the strength and the sustainability of our strategy that would help us survive.

This very unique time frame in our industry's life cycle has prompted a lot of next-level analysis for hospitality and restaurant professionals alike. With this most recent, albeit involuntarily window of time, we at Payroll Pumas took this chance to think and move more passionately into this growing consciousness about the nature of our work - especially from a lens like Atlanta Breakfast Club. And being in an environment like Atlanta Breakfast Club has decided advantages. We have been able to examine and witness restaurants like Atlanta Breakfast Club, located in the heart of Downtown Atlanta adjacent to the Georgia Aquarium, serve simultaneously as tourist attractions, geographical landmarks, cultural institutions and entertainment establishments.

One really beautiful thing about the Atlanta Breakfast Club's demographic is the depth of guests' fanhood. For the past five years, ABC has reaped the rewards of their love and loyalty via millions of dollars worth of transactions, thousands of Yelp reviews, and hundreds of regularly scheduled visits (7). In addition to guests' love for our restaurant brand, local and visiting guests alike have also participated in the deep, relentless adoration that guests from all over the world have for some of the biggest brands ever created: sports teams. As a globally recommended tourist attraction, located only minutes away from the State Farm Arena and Mercedes Benz Stadium, Atlanta Breakfast Club has hosted fans of Power 5 College Football and Basketball programs, National Football League teams, NBA clubs, MLB teams, MLS, and the like. Being in such close proximity to such major organizations has shown Good Food & Company that in a microcosmic way, we are not only a team ourselves, but one of the highest performing in their field, too. We have a home court. We have loyal fans that purchase our paraphernalia to illustrate their visible and boundless affection in the face of other organizations. And we absolutely have professional athletes - world class, professional athletes.

Merriam Webster defines an athlete as "a person who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports, or games requiring physical strength, agility, or stamina" (8). Not only does our group excel at feats of mental and physical acuity from as early as 4:30 AM until 6 or 7 PM daily, they also wear uniforms while doing so. That in itself is a sort of tell-tell sign of a sports team. The consistent acts of balance, precision, and accuracy that our restaurant professionals have to execute immensely mirror to those of major professional athletes. Our team members train and practice for years and years on end to be the best at what they do - sometimes matriculating to premier, award-winning, highly competitive positions. And much like sports, our industry is built up on the observation and consumption of the labor and technology of human bodies.

Compared to other professions, restaurant workers use their body to a similarly significant degree to perform the duties and functions of their roles. A 2012 study conducted by famed weight loss magnate Jenny Craig "found that waiters take 23,000 steps a day, more than double the recommended 10,000 steps a day to keep fit" (9). As recently as 2018, the US Department of Labor determined through another study that "56% of food preparation and serving related jobs required a medium strength... [with] even higher percentages of cook jobs required medium strength" (10). They further substantiate the claim with the notion that restaurant workers lift on average anywhere from 33 - 36 pounds daily at their jobs. One of our event coordinators worked a major event recently and over the course of the entire (12 hour) shift walked more than 25,000 steps - which equates to more than approximately 11.7 miles. Grant it,

that is more anecdotal evidence. But it is not only sustained, it is also supported by the lived experience of restaurant professionals here in Atlanta and in regions all over the world.

For us at the Payroll Pumas Movement, at first glance, these findings were merely information - just data to be frank. But all great businesses know that where there is data, there is insight. And in conjunction with our increased understanding of the relationship between restaurants and entertainment, and a limited edition Puma shoe - this insight was exactly the last ingredient that our recipe for impact needed.

It has long been the goal of the Payroll Pumas Movement to influence the hospitality industry in a way that reflects, not only our relentless love for our profession, but our deeply rooted comprehension of its nuances and needs. Well before the pandemic, our team pursued as many avenues as possible to blaze trails for our beloved community of restaurant leaders and artists. Oda Nobunaga is quoted as having said that “without destruction, there is no creation” (11). The restaurant trade’s current circumstance simply provided a destruction of norms and customs that has forced us all to adapt, adjust, and create. In the Darwinian school of thought, adaption is the primary strategy organisms use to evolve. An organism’s ability to evolve fundamentally underscores its ability to survive. And survival is the primary goal of all organisms. But we are most interested in ways to reach beyond the fickle brink of survival and make our industry as sustainable as possible.

So we gathered our experience, our data, our shoes, and all the other resources we could muster to develop a strategy that enables us to push our line of work forward - in a time when progress seems all but implausible. We were then swiftly reminded of a very strategic partnership that we have been fortunate enough to have fostered of the past two years. And of course, this is where PUMA comes in - again. We have an idea that may fall right in line with the nature of your work while also filling a critical, but unknown need in our industry. With consideration to your role as Senior Manager of Strategic Partnerships, the Payroll Pumas team would like to propose a project that will strengthen our collaborative efforts and leave an immeasurable mark on our respective arenas.

We would like to partner with Puma to create a restaurant industry specify shoe - ultimately granting the restaurant professional an unprecedented level of athletic brand support. This shoe would very directly address the well-developed, yet under-tapped and still emerging market of restaurant and hospitality professionals before it emerges. We want to commercially and broadly reframe restaurant professionals as the next generation of everyday athletes doing what winning athletes do with ease and consistency - while furnishing them with the absolute best gear to do it in. We have identified not only a market, but also a need for restaurant professionals’ that equates to approximately 12.5 millions Americans employed in the United States alone (12). A shoe isn’t the “end-all, be-all” solution for restaurants and workers; that is not to negate the possibilities that it could bring to fruition. A shoe being sold and purchased by millions worldwide could curate new job opportunities for some of the experts in our field. Those revenues being generated could launch funds that create and facilitate health equity and education networks for restaurant workers and their families. The lifespan of a well-designed footwear product could also very well lead into the synergies of some of Puma’s most cutting edge technologies. And this is not to say that something along these lines doesn’t already exist. However, the caliber of shoe that we aim to create could also one day be incorporated into an

entire lifestyle and apparel component of the already wonderfully vast Puma brand. We quite honestly can change the game by making the Puma banner synonymous with one of our most fundamental needs as humans - the food we love, and the places, and people, that it comes from.

Essentially, we want to design a new, multi-dimensional, innovative relationship that mirrors Puma's rich and unique history with athlete artists such as Pele and Atlanta's very own Walt "Clyde" Frazier (13). Even Joe Namath's historic deal was initially described by Karl Wallach as "most unusual to say the least" but was indirectly connected to the development of the first superstar athlete after Namath led the New York Jets to the first ever Super Bowl title 1969 (13). The creative, cultural, and economic ramifications of the right alliances (or strategic partnerships, if you will) is even evident in the Puma's relationship with the likes of globally revered hip-hop artist and business mogul Shawn "Jay - Z" Carter. We at Payroll Pumas sincerely see Puma as the most capable brand to capitalize on this revolutionary, product-based collaboration and look forward to the challenge of changing our world together.

We could theorize about this at length. We'd like to thank you for the space to organize some of our imaginings as it has been our absolute pleasure to share these things with you. On behalf of our entire team, we very much are looking forward to the opportunity to continue this conversation with you and any respective members of your team that may find this project of value. If you have any availability some time in the near future, we would love to set up a call or some other mechanism to move our exchange into next steps. Additionally, there are several supplementary resources detailing the objectives and potential outcomes of the project that we would love to share should you be interested.

Once again, we appreciate everything that PUMA has done with us - and most importantly, for us. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to reach out.

Thank You Again & Best Wishes,

Raven Gibson & Angelique Ribeiro  
Payroll Pumas, Inc.

## References:

1. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-07/over-110-000-restaurants-have-closed-with-sector-in-free-fall>
2. <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>
3. [https://www.ellensstardustdiner.com/?fbclid=IwAR0C2MsgcIqKeMI2-j944V1UcV8O6TNCkxkX5-vjvm\\_NVpNV1Ze1CG5-b3w](https://www.ellensstardustdiner.com/?fbclid=IwAR0C2MsgcIqKeMI2-j944V1UcV8O6TNCkxkX5-vjvm_NVpNV1Ze1CG5-b3w)
4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/theater/the-first-role-for-many-actors-waiter.html>
5. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/19/entertainment/tyler-perry-studios/index.html>
6. <https://people.com/food/bars-and-restaurants-owned-by-hollywoods-hottest-stars/?slide=7162342#7162342>
7. <https://www.yelp.com/biz/atlanta-breakfast-club-atlanta?osq=Best+Restaurants>
8. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/athlete>
9. <https://www.ibtimes.com.au/study-waiters-take-average-23000-steps-day-1295370>
10. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/physical-requirements-in-food-preparation-and-serving-jobs.htm>
11. [SamuraweWisdom Abstracted,](#)
12. <https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/research/industry-statistics/national-statistics/>
13. [Sneaker Wars](#)