

Broad Matters Season 7 Episode 5 “Meal Planning On A Budget” with Adam Roy

Quinetta Roberson:

Welcome to Broad Matters, a podcast bringing you thought leadership, innovative perspectives, and real-world impact from Michigan State University's Eli Broad College of Business. I'm Quinetta Roberson, the John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor of Management and Psychology. On this episode, I'm flying solo as the host today.

In the studio with me is Adam Roy from our renowned School of Hospitality Business. Adam is the Dr. Lewis J. and Mrs. Ruth E. Minor Chef and Professor of Culinary Management. Prior to joining academia, Adam traveled the world as a young cook, working on private yachts, large cruise ships, restaurants, European luxury hotels, and later as an executive chef for five-star hotels and resorts in Asia and the Middle East.

Adam Roy:

Broad sets the tone for business in the Big Ten. It has a great reputation. I'm a very proud member of Broad, to be honest, and I hope to contribute even more in the future throughout my career here.

Quinetta Roberson:

Today, we'll be talking about a topic that almost everyone can resonate with, supermarket inflation. Adam has some tips and tricks that will help you embrace flexibility when creating meals at home without sacrificing your wallet. Welcome, Adam.

Adam Roy:

Thank you for having me.

Quinetta Roberson:

Before we hear your insights and best practices, please tell us about yourself and your role at Broad College.

Adam Roy:

My role at Broad College and the School of Hospitality Business is to teach mostly food and beverage courses. We're focused on lab, hands-on learning with one of my culinary classes, and also beverage and beverage management with the hospitality beverage appreciation course. In the beverage course, we go through the learning outcomes of most hospitality beverages that the students encounter throughout their career, and in the food class, we kind of build menus and create what we build throughout the semester in the kitchen itself.

Quinetta Roberson:

You said building menus and we typically hear a lot about meal planning and meal prep, particularly from a fitness perspective, but I'd love to get a point of view from a chef.

Adam Roy:

I'm still looking at health and wellness when I'm shopping around, I'm looking at things more so now than I did when I was younger, looking for those evil ingredients that are not doing our bodies any good. So I kind of approach in that way. However, I'm looking at it from a financial point of view. I'm a frugal

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person. I'm very proud to be frugal. It's not nice to give all your money to all these companies, especially when inflation rises and prices are a little bit out of whack. That's kind of the approach that I'm looking at in general when I'm walking through that supermarket.

Quinetta Roberson:

So do you have any tips? I often think about from a marketing perspective, putting the things that are catchy at eye level. How do we get around that and buy the things that are good for us that are going to create a great meal?

Adam Roy:

If you can afford it, time wise I mean, to take your slow, peaceful evening, late evening when you're not in a rush hopefully, and you can walk around or zigzag through those aisles in a more meaningful way where you're not just glancing at what you need, you're looking at things that you might not always use. When you take those into consideration, other ideas might pop into your head or other opportunities might pop up and say, "Hey, that's something that I would eat and let me see how I can prepare this, for example, or what can I look up to think about creating a nice dish on top of that."

Quinetta Roberson:

I feel completely seen. My husband says that I spend too much time in the grocery store, but I use the zigzag approach.

Adam Roy:

There might be another tip. You kind of keep on the outside of the refrigerated areas and the perimeter of the supermarket instead of just zigzagging through the dry store lines. There's a lot less processed foods around the perimeter of the supermarket as opposed to the center where it's all pretty much preservatives, high fructose corn syrup, and other things. So I would definitely suggest anybody kind of looking for a healthier alternative to stick to the coolers and the fresher ingredients if you can, and of course, just to go to the grocery store instead of once a week. If you can go a few multiple times, you'd pick up less than you'd probably completely eat what you've purchased in all respects.

Quinetta Roberson:

I've heard you say before that the key is embracing flexibility. Is that fair?

Adam Roy:

For sure. A hundred percent. Building a nice pantry, even from a chef's point of view, is the way to go. Building a pantry of stuff that you're going to use to not let it go to waste or to expire. Same as a cooler. Things don't get better in a dry source. They get worse. The idea is to kind of use what you have.

Quinetta Roberson:

You mentioned expiration dates, and I just wanted to ask about those. Do you have any things you could say about that?

Adam Roy:

In my master's degree, I did a big report on expiry dates. I call myself a semi-pro at expiry dates. There needs to be a little bit of common sense when you're talking about “best buy”, “use before”, “expire on”

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- all these kind of dates that are floating around. The consumers are confused, so are the companies. The only thing that is regulated actually by the FDA is baby food and seafood. Those are the only two things that are actually regulated. Everything else is kind of subject to change.

A lot of companies might put a year date on something like say, salt or pasta. That doesn't mean it's bad, so don't ever throw things away. Use your intuition, smell things, look at things and decide was it a hot summer? Maybe that paprika powder is not as good as it should be. Is it going to kill me? Probably not. I buy some soon-to-expire yogurt all the time. Yogurt is a great example. Don't be afraid because that doesn't really expire as fast as we think it does, but it does have a “best before” date because companies can guarantee a quality by that date.

Quinetta Roberson:

You also say investing in a few countertop appliances can help with food prep. This is top of mind for me because I have an air fryer, which probably does not get as much use as it needs to, but at the same time, I just got a sous vide machine, which is my new favorite toy. What are the things we should have or how should we use them? What's your tips and strategies?

Adam Roy:

I use these things to help with a little bit of prep, or if I don't want a huge busy stovetop, I can use an air fryer to brown meat, for example, or proteins or vegetables or whatever. I can sauté in an air fryer if it's an all-in-one, for example. I can pressure cook tough cuts of meats and I can have that pre-cooked, so I can just make a quick sauce, mix it in the sauce or simmer it a little bit, and then that'll kind of complement my cooking where I don't have to have all that oil splatters all over the stovetop walls and around where I'm cooking. Those devices are there to kind of help create a little bit of time saving. I can put something in the air fryer or under pressure, for example, in the pressure cooker, and I can cook that piece of meat or vegetable or whatever I want to cook quite quickly if I just set it to a certain temperature.

I could slow cook something. I grew up on slow-cooked mother's chili on the stovetop. You come home and it's pretty much just putting it on high, boiling it once more, seasoning it, and then it's done. I do a lot with sous vide. I have a sous vide circulator. I also have a vacuum pack machine. And when I buy, for example, ham, you can buy it at the deli for about \$5 a pound, \$6 a pound for sliced ham. I can buy a whole ham after Easter, after Christmas, after Thanksgiving. I can slice it myself, I can vacuum pack it, and it stays good for many, many, many weeks in my refrigerator as long as I vacuum pack it right. That's 79 cents a pound compared to \$6 a pound.

I'm very proud to be cheap. May I say that once more, but why should I have maybe a more processed ham? I can buy a whole leg ham that's not put together with meat glue. It's not this ultra-processed deli meat. It's just a kind of single processed deli meat, I would say, and then I can take that and use that in my sandwiches throughout the week. I can cook with it. I can make stews. I can put it in any kind of dishes that I want. I do vacuum seal a lot of things: sauces, I make my own kimchi, for example. I can vacuum pack it. It helps in saving a freezer space. I can buy things when they're low-priced and then I can hunker down and not buy things when things go a little bit higher.

Quinetta Roberson:

Adam, I'm sorry for this in advance. I'm going to have to go down a rabbit hole because you were talking about not being afraid of soon-to-expire yogurt or other items. Can you help me understand? Are all soon-to-expire items okay, or how do I pick?

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Adam Roy:

You're right. You got to be a little bit careful. I walked by the other day at some discounted mushrooms. They were half priced. They were in a box, they were pre-sliced, looked great, took them home, cooked them the same day, no problem. If you're going to go shopping for soon-to-expire items or look around that last chance aisle, you have to do it with a little bit of carefulness and a little bit of thoughtfulness to kind of make sure that you're not going to just buy something and then put it in your refrigerator for another two weeks like my mom does. You're going to have to be a little bit more strategic. I do like to go through the last chance aisles. I do like to buy something that's on the bread shelf that's probably half price that you can get, but I'm going to eat that very soon.

If it's not today, I will definitely eat it tomorrow. The meats are the worst because when you see that they're already brown and off color, you're not going to buy anything at all. But the freezers have great deals and you could thaw things out well, and you can get a great price on a frozen Turkey after Thanksgiving, for example, thaw it out, debone it, and then you can cut it up into portions, vacuum pack it. You can refreeze it if it's kept in a good zone. Sous vide-ing something, I can actually sous vide a bunch of things that are in packaging already, and then that'll actually stay pasteurized in my refrigerator for months if I sous vide it at the right temperatures. So keeping sous vide in mind, it's not just for tender cooking, it's also for keeping things longer in your refrigerator. As long as you don't open up a Cryovac pork tenderloin and you sous vide it for 145 degrees for a couple hours, it's pasteurized and it'll stay medium rare until you're ready to use it.

Quinetta Roberson:

It is so great to be here with my fellow frugal brethren. My husband also says I should have been born in the 1800s because I don't like anything to go to waste.

Adam Roy:

I must add real quick that I never eat the same meal twice at home, never, and I always eat something different, but it's always delicious. I have the skills and the experience as a chef to make anything taste nice. My wife and I cook a lot of Asian food at home. We also don't follow any recipes. I never think of what I'm going to cook. I just see what I have, and then I put together a meal in five minutes. Potato hash, for example, you could dice anything you have in the refrigerator, dice potatoes, brown the potatoes first, add anything in, season it well, and you have potato hash. Put a couple legs on it, breakfast for dinner. So that would be a kind of a cheap trick.

I like noodles, for example. You can take dry ramen noodles, saute whatever you have left over, some leftover beef stew, some leftover vegetables, leftover seasonings. Put those noodles in, put a half a cup of white wine on, cover it up with a lid, let it steam. Then take the lid off, and then you can keep on frying the noodles, the best fried noodles in about 10 minutes.

Quinetta Roberson:

I mean, I love it. You're just kind of like, "And you can do this and you can do this," just like free styling. For those people who may not be professional chefs, can you give them any guidance? How can they do what you just described without conjuring up too much anxiety?

Adam Roy:

If you had a couple of things on your countertop and you knew what starches you wanted to serve and you knew what proteins or vegetarian proteins, for example, or vegetables you wanted to serve, and

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you knew what kind of flavor that you'd prefer and you wanted to make your family happy for sure, you don't want them to reject it. Because if they don't eat it, it's a waste of time. So to kind of put all those things on the counter and start experimenting maybe once a week. Do traditional meals six days a week, then maybe once a week kind of get out of the comfort zone and go more towards experimentation a little bit and seeing how you can transfer those flavors into something that everybody likes. Then maybe bring it up to two days a week. If I was not a professional chef, I still would start to practice like that.

Take something from your cabinet or your pantry that's been there for a while. Look up a nice recipe. There's a lot of people who are digging deeper into videos that they even want to explore. They don't have to go to a cooking school anymore. You don't have to take a class if you don't want to. You can look online. You can use apps now to scan your pantry, enter in everything you have, and they'll spit out a recipe for you. You don't have those spices or those exact seasonings. Don't worry. Never worry. The food will always be good as long as you taste it along the way.

Quinetta Roberson:

When you think about hospitality as an industry and what trends are happening now or what may be on the forefront, what are you most excited about?

Adam Roy:

I'm most excited about new innovations and going back to cultural, authentic cuisines. These cuisines that were not around when I was young are much more interesting now. They've gone many, many layers deeper since the tech has brought out TikTok videos, Facebook posts. All these things that we can see on YouTube that are in front of us, we want taste those flavors too. When Anthony Bourdain traveled to all these destinations, we want to go into those places ourselves at home, and we want to taste what he was tasting with those great people that he was surrounded with. Digging deeper into cultures and going hyper-cultural focused cuisines that have not been around in this continent, for example, for many, many years. Now the guests can get away with tasting things and don't have to travel 5,000 miles overseas.

Quinetta Roberson:

Do you think that people are ready for that trend, that their palates are kind of open to this diversity of food or diversity of flavors?

Adam Roy:

Some yes. Some think they're ready and then they go in and they just order the pad thai, so some people might not order that jungle curry that's super weird with all these great spices, but that gateway dish of pad thai leads them into something else. From a hospitality professional perspective, I would say that it takes a lot of education to our customers and a lot of time given to teach them. Once we have that connection, it is unbreakable. When I share a recipe, they actually come back more, they want that next experience. They're not just going to stay at home and cook that one recipe forever because that's not what they want. They want to explore. They want to uncover this great cuisine or this great experience that they couldn't just have in a normal restaurant or at home by themselves. So I'm happy to give anybody any recipes that they want.

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Quinetta Roberson:

How do you integrate your decades of culinary knowledge into the classroom, or really how do you inspire your students?

Adam Roy:

In my classroom here at the School of Hospitality Business, my classes are always based around making money. I teach how to make money with the things that we can plan, we can price out, we can strategize, we can market, especially as food and beverage professionals. A lot of my students will not be chefs, and that's okay. The idea for them is how to work with a professional chef, how to guide a professional chef or work together and make money together because if there's any kind of friction or there's any kind of disagreement or they're not on the same page, there's going to be a lot of money lost and that is not good business.

Quinetta Roberson:

So I have to ask, what's your favorite dish to make?

Adam Roy:

I'm a smoker, but I'm not a smoker of cigarettes. My specialty is smoking using a wood-burning smoker at home. So I've been blessed with the knowledge of working in a tex-mex smokehouse steakhouse when I was very young, and I've taken that smoke knowledge to create wonderful, wonderful dishes at home now. I use that in the kitchens, wherever I work. I always influence the GM to buy me a nice new \$50,000 smoker, so I could do wonderful things with all different kinds of meats and proteins and vegetables and things. You can smoke tomatoes, for example, and make a great tomato soup. You can cold smoke salmon that's raw, slice it, season it, and grill it on a grill, and you'll have a medium rare smoked salmon steak. It's the best that you've ever had in your life. I can cold smoke proteins. I can cold smoke cheeses. I can do hot and cold smoking techniques with a lot of different things.

My favorite thing that I've discovered in the last three or four years, and I started it during COVID was offset grilling. So using a charcoal barbecue. The Indians kind of do this with tandoori style cooking too. So you have hot charcoals on one side of the grill. Then you have a protein or whatever you want to grill on the other side, and those charcoals heat up. You add a little bit of oil on them and you cover it and you seal the grill cover really, really well, and you slow bake that protein or that item really, really, really slow.

As that protein kind of gets a real nice charcoal smoke, not wood smoke, but kind of charcoal smoke, you move it over closer to the fire, and that is the greatest kind of way to cook burgers or steaks or vegetables or whole heads of cauliflower. I've done everything in a smoker, and especially now with that grill, I can do anything with that kind of charcoal smoking style.

Quinetta Roberson:

And so you did not think to bring any of this with you?

Adam Roy:

I'm sorry. Next time, next time, next time.

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Quinetta Roberson:

Are there any things you don't like to make?

Adam Roy:

No. I eat everything, and I've eaten the weirdest kind of food that you could possibly imagine that would make people cringe at the site or the sound of it. Living overseas for 20 years, I was able to experience so many different kinds of ethnic cuisines, and we've traveled to the weirdest places of the quarters of Nepal or Thailand or China and tried something that's so, so interesting. And the best way that I kind of approach this was just dig in, never say no. As soon as you dig in, doors open, hearts open, language comes out, and that is a very, very high level of respect for somebody's culture. So I'm very, very lucky to have found a career that brings me down a path of cultural learning and bringing me into these great situations to have wonderful, wonderful experiences with local people.

Quinetta Roberson:

Going back to the question of how do you inspire your students and developing these skills, this cultural learning, this cultural intelligence, I think is really valuable.

Adam Roy:

We have one of the most diverse professions in the world. Everybody from all different backgrounds work in food and beverage, at least a year of their life at least. It's always a stepping stone. It's not always the permanent pathway, but it's definitely a stepping stone. A lot of people don't know what a chef really does. They think when, "Oh, I'm a chef." "Oh, you cook." Well, no. Well, I probably do that about 5% of the time when I'm an executive chef. The rest of my time is strategizing, planning, HR stuff, coaching, menu planning, meal planning, events for thousands of thousands of people. We have to put on all these wonderful theatrics for all these customers who are paying a high price at a five-star level hotel or resort. So keeping on our toes brings us more into what a chef really does. My last team, I had 132 cooks on my team in my last five-Star hotel. That's a big team. I was one of the biggest teams in the entire hotel. We don't just cook anymore as executive chefs. We do a lot more than that.

Quinetta Roberson:

Well, Adam, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast. It's been great talking to you today. How can we keep up with your work going forward?

Adam Roy:

Anybody can reach out to me anytime through my MSU email. You can come and visit me in the Kellogg Center if you'd like. I'm not a big social media player. I don't post. That's my style. It's not about me. It's about looking at my friends and family all across the world and what they're doing. Anybody can contact me anytime through email or any way through MSU.

Quinetta Roberson:

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