

Akahoshi X Yume Wo Katare Collaboration reflection

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Part 1: Getting ready for the Pop up.

Mike Satinover flew to Boston to work at YWK and to do a pop up. This collaboration was not two chefs making a dish together; it was about two people collaborating on passion and learning from each other.

I base a lot of my decision making on how I feel and when I met Mike a few years ago, our conversations made me feel we had some chemistry. Based on this instinct, I flew to Chicago to try his Miso ramen and it was the best ramen I ever had; it gave me the feels, yaaa know. Ramen to me needs to pull an emotion out of me. Yume Wo Katare ramen was the first ramen that I caught a vibe with and Akahoshi miso ramen is the second.

A few chefs approached me over the years wanting to do a collaboration, their pitch was to make a special dish together and sell it. To me this is very money driven motivation and I don't care about money. I feel there are so many more things that are valuable than money and in this case, the friendship and bond that I will develop with Mike and the knowledge that we can exchange from our dedication to our craft.

Mike and I decided to only sell 70 bowls because we wanted to focus on quality and not quantity. He told me his highest rating for his ramen for a pop up was 8.5/10 and my dream was to beat that score. When I expressed this dream to him, his initial reaction was doubtful. There were too many external factors that he was worried about. These factors were a new kitchen, space, different ingredients, different water, etc. I was on the other hand confident with our initial chemistry that together we can create something special.

We had a few phone meetings to set expectations of each other and create some deliverable milestones. These deliverables were some documents and photos to which Mike got them to be before or on the deadline we both agreed on. So off the bat, his professionalism is already above my standard which made me feel that this collaboration is going to go really well.

In my Art of Making noodles series, I decluttered and organized the noodle room, so the room's primary focus was on making good noodles. The days leading up to Mike's arrival in Boston, I decided I needed to do the same for all of YWK. Erik and I completely decluttered YWK and threw out 40% of our stuff. I wanted YWK to be as minimalistic as possible. I wanted the space to be like a blank sheet of paper. With this blank space, is where two people with passion can foster in. Another reason for this is to set the bar 2 notches above our normal standards, so in

case of cleanliness and organization, with all the craziness going on this week, if our new standards drop, it will drop down to our regular standards.

When Mike arrived in Boston, the first task we had to focus on was prepping for his pop up. Mike was worried that he was going to be in my way since I had to prepare for service as well. However, I told him not to worry and I will prepare around him.

The pop up was on Saturday but we decided to have a rehearsal on Friday night after service. Everything needed to be ready by then. After the first few bowls were made, feedback was given immediately to help Mike dial in his miso ramen. We took time to focus on each of the components of his miso ramen and figure out how to make it the best it possibly can be.

Part 2: Day of the Akahoshi Pop up.

Saturday morning at 830AM, I had Mike come to the store. The first 15 mins we used to brew some coffee, relax and chat about the plan for the day. The goal was to be ready fully to open 10 mins early.

Prep was easy as we planned very well and around 10:10AM, we were informed that there were like 30 customers outside. By 10:50, there were already 70 customers waiting outside.

One of the most important things was that I did not want the egg to be cold. Mike told us to put it in boiling water for 30 seconds. We asked the first round of customers to tell us if the egg was still cold inside. It was, and we had to dial in the eggs, which took 1m30 seconds to get it nice and warm.

The second most important thing was getting the chashu done well. We decided to air fry the pork logs during service to give it a nice dark char around it. This gave the pork belly a wonderful contrast in the bowl. I messed up a few times because I air fried it for too long which resulted in some of the belly's having a very hard crust that was impossible to cut through and made it too taxing for customers to eat.

This event has been hyped up for two weeks and customers are going to wait at least 3 hours. Having these two things in mind, we needed to deliver on the best possible bowl of miso ramen we could. The last few rounds, we ran out of chashu and I had to switch to yume shoulder. One thing that we did was be aware of the quality or change in the bowl and be direct with customers about it.

Letting customers know we are aware of the mistakes or asking them to provide feedback so we can dial in the bowl more, customers became very understanding of our situation. If we didn't ask the first customers to let us know if the eggs were cold, they might have given us a bad rating. However, since we were trying to figure it out and asked, even though they got a bad egg, it was still okay because we showed transparency.

Overall, I thought the event went extremely well and to be honest, the mistakes we made were not that bad because we were hyper aware of all the moving parts and quickly resolved any mistakes that came up. We did not make the same mistake twice that day and that is all that matters to me. First mistakes are always okay, but second mistakes are not.

Part 3: Mike working at Yume.

In the days leading up to the pop up, Mike worked at YWK and was in the kitchen with me making ramen.

Service 1:

His first tasks were simple: Weigh out noodles, throw them into the boiling water, stir, put out bowls, fill bowls with tare, and replenish tare.

I said if he was able to consistently do these tasks without fail, he would advance to the next level.

Service 2:

Eventually he was able to advance to the next level which was turning off the fire, turning on the cold water to shock the noodles, pulling the noodles and turning the fire back on.

I said if he was able to consistently do these tasks without fail, he would advance to the next level.

He kept failing to turn the fire back on, thus he didn't advance to the next level.

Service 3:

Saturday, after the Akahoshi pop up, was Mike's last shift at YWK. However, I lost my voice and could not speak or lead well that day. But this was a blessing in disguise because during year one of my training, my master Tsuyoshi did not speak english and I did not speak Japanese, yet we were able to communicate and work well with each other.

So on that day, the members really had to step up their game.

Mike kept failing to turn the fire back on and half way through service, I whispered to Mike "the only thing stopping you from advancing to the next level is turning on the fire, please"

One simple line out of my mouth was all it took Mike to be motivated to accomplish this task. For the next few rounds, he was able to turn the fire back on and I advanced him to the next level.

The final result is that, as long as I cut the chashu and ladle the soup for him, I was able to step away from the kitchen and he was able to finish making the ramen and serve the customer.

The original goal was to have him do the entire round by himself but he will advance to that level if he chooses to come back to work. However, I am proud of the level he was able to get up to in the 3 services he ran.

Part 4: Why did the Akahoshi X YWK collaboration happen?

Yume Ramen was the first ramen I truly fell in love with. It is a very simple ramen but simple is not easy to accomplish and its simplicity is what I love.

Over the years, I have eaten many other types of ramen but nothing provokes the emotions that Yume ramen gave me. It was until I ate Mike Satinover aka Ramen Lord's Akahoshi Miso Ramen which provokes similar feelings to Yume ramen.

Outside of my own ramen, I can safely say, the Akahoshi Miso ramen is my favorite ramen in the world.

I tried very hard to replicate it but failed so many times that I asked Mike to come to Boston to do a pop up. After working with Mike on making the miso ramen, I realized that, unless I put all my time and energy into it, I will never make it as good as Mike. If I put all my efforts into it, it will take me away from improving my own ramen.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity to focus on mastering one dish for the last 6 years. Mike has been working and mastering his miso ramen for the last 10 years.

Hard work knows hard work.

I don't consider Mike a chef, I consider him a craftsman. So I decided to stop trying to make it but rather learn from him and apply his craftsmanship to my own ramen.

So the reason this pop up happened was getting two people into a room and bonding with each other over our craft.

You as the customer who got to eat this miso ramen and paid \$18 bucks...my debt to you has not been fulfilled yet, let me explain why.

Preston Landers was on the way to a ramen podcast and one thing he mentioned is value creation to a product. I think \$14 of the ramen is from ingredient cost, labor cost, gas and electric cost. However, what does the \$4 go to? Some might think that's extra profit, no, I am already paid enough getting to do what I love everyday. So this \$4 I am still in debt to you as the customer.

Because of this pop up, growth happened.

With that growth comes improved ramen, more YWK lessons and content on IG, and countless other values.

This is how I repay you for the last \$4.