

Garden Fresh Superstar Mike Griffin

With over a decade as Creative Director under his belt and a recent elevation to Chief Creative Officer, Mike Griffin is part of the core team at Garden Fresh Gourmet. He is reluctant to take full credit for the look of the branding for all the products falling under the Garden Fresh Gourmet umbrella, but he admits that his capacity as gatekeeper is a big responsibility. Mike explains that when he came to the company, it was already successful and his job was to “not screw it up.” This unpretentious tone is typical, and surfaces again when asked about his recent promotion. He acknowledges that he is gratified to be recognized, but quickly follows by stating that Garden Fresh is “not a culture of titles.” He then extolls the virtues of the company stating that Garden Fresh Gourmet’s culture is “one of the (company’s) greatest assets.” Mike boasts that Garden Fresh, “... is a culture of health, fitness, healthy lifestyles, community involvement.” He further notes that, “all of these things, it comes by honestly.” The glowing manner in which he speaks about the company is clear evidence of his pride on being a part of this team and what a true admirer he is of all that Garden Fresh stands for.

Lessons Learned on the Journey

When asked about particularly challenging or inspiring moments in his decade-long journey with Garden Fresh, Mike is pensive, then begins to recount the time when Pepsi offered to purchase Garden Fresh. Jack, Annette, and John (Latella) had gone to New York to close the deal. Mike recalls standing in his kitchen, taking the phone call from Jack who was in a taxi heading back to the airport after turning down the Pepsi deal. “Two hours ago,” he told Mike, “Millions of dollars were being handed to me and

now I am millions in debt, and I have never been happier.” Griffin notes that this call reminded him of why he was so proud to be a part of Garden Fresh. Pepsi wanted to take Garden Fresh production from Michigan and move it out of state. This would have had an enormous impact on the ~450 people who are employed by Garden Fresh and their families. This was not something that Jack and Annette could agree to. Mike says that this incident in particular was a lesson in moral courage, ethics and integrity and that it made him feel enormously happy to be a “part of a truly great company.”

The Future of Garden Fresh

When asked about his vision for the future, Griffin is again modest. He says that it is a simple fact that a business will either grow larger or get smaller (it’s almost impossible to stay the same size) and that he hopes to see Garden Fresh continue to grow. He qualifies this by saying that it will grow bigger and better, not simply bigger for the sake of growth. He talks about the security found in scale, the fact that with a larger organization there are more resources, and it is easier to make the very best possible products. This is always the goal at Garden Fresh.

Our Mission: Gather the world’s best ingredients, craft them into delicious, high-quality, proprietary products and offer them at a reasonable price.

Our Vision: Be the premier provider of premium deli products and establish Garden Fresh Gourmet as a national brand through our dedication to quality, innovation and faithful adherence to our core values.

Great Achievements

A couple of years into his career with GF, Griffin was asked to manage the process of developing Garden Fresh’s Mission and Vision Statements. He worked with the best minds in the company and after about 6 weeks of meetings to craft and refine the

statements, they hammered it out, and produced concise Mission and Vision statements that Mike says, “still hold up today.” He further mentions that “these are not just words on a piece of paper, but rather, express Garden Fresh’s core values which are authentic and closely adhered to by the Garden Fresh team.” True words from the man behind the look of Garden Fresh Gourmet.