

# Finding your Treasures

Interview by HUGO BRAVO

Eric D. Hall, life skills coach for the Culinary Arts Training Program at The Salvation Army Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center in Boston, talks about the meaning of life skills, the importance of financial literacy, and seeing the culinary arts students he mentored succeed.

**My definition of life skills** is seeing what you need in life to live truly happy, not just to exist day-to-day. You could have a job making great income and paying every bill, but if you hate where you work, you will never be as happy as the guy making a little less money but who walks into work smiling every day. Life skills will show you what's already inside you, and how to use that to take ownership of your process. It's the difference between floating and swimming; do you want to just lie motionless in the water, or do you want to kick your feet, move your arms, and decide where to go?

**When Chef Timothy Tucker** started the first culinary arts training program for The Salvation Army in Kentucky, he wanted to include life skills as part of the curriculum. He knew it would be key to being a part of the culinary industry. When he brought the program to the Boston Kroc, I was a guest speaker for its first class, officially began working at the Kroc for the second class, and 27 classes later, I'm still here. While Chef Tucker works with them inside the kitchen, I work with them on everything they will need to be successful outside of the kitchen. They learn how to turn their skills into a real career, making their name known in the industry, and becoming their own brand.

**Outside of the Kroc**, my favorite thing to teach is financial literacy to young people. I partner with local organizations in the community to hold workshops for kids, and we use games to learn the meaning of terms like compound interest, budgets, credit reports, and mortgages. Children pick up the information so quickly; they all love learning about these topics. Sometimes, I use the same curriculum on financial literacy for kids that I use to teach grown-ups. If you grew up like I did, our parents didn't talk to us about money. There weren't local business owners to show us how to start a business. There was no talk about mortgages if you lived in housing developments. So, when I do these workshops with adults, I never hold it against them that they're learning this for the first time. None of us knew, and someone should have taught it to us.

**I wrote a book** called *The Diamond Project: Find and Develop Your Hidden Treasures*. There are treasures inside all of us put there by God. We are responsible for finding them and making them work for us in our lives. I also talk about my own adversities in life, and how I worked through them to find my own treasures too. Many of the principles in the book are what I use with the students at the Boston Kroc. My next book will be a children's book called *Diamonds R Us*. I wrote it with my daughter Nalani Hall. It's aimed for younger readers and includes the lessons taught in *The Diamond Project*.

**What I love the most about the work I do** is seeing the students who have taken the information I've given them farther than where I could see. Hearing someone tell me about their restaurant, their new food truck, or the cookbook they just wrote makes me sleep so well at night. Being a small part of someone's testimony on their road to success is priceless. I have an aunt who always asks if I'm ever going to go into preaching and work for a ministry. I tell her, "Auntie, this is my ministry."

