

The Heart Attack Grill: free market or social responsibility?

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ABSTRACT

Jon Basso, the founder and owner of The Heart Attack Grill said on Bloomberg Television February 20, 2017, “I am probably the only restaurateur in the entire world who is unapologetically telling you that my food is bad for you, that it will kill you and that you should stay away from it” (Lattin, 2017). And Mr. Basso is correct on many levels. Certainly, few restaurateurs advise patrons not to dine at their establishments and communicate a restaurant motto that states this will be a meal that is “worth dying for.” This case will focus on the unique business model presented by Jon Brasso and The Heart Attack Grill. The case will explore the innovative and controversial implications behind Mr. Brasso’s use of “reverse” marketing. The case is designed for use in upper-division undergraduate courses in general business, management, human resources, economics and/or marketing.

Keywords: free market, ethics, food services, The Heart Attack Grill, John Rawls and Robert Nozick



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INTRODUCTION

The story behind The Heart Attack Grill is as interesting as the restaurant itself. Jon Brasso began his career in Arizona as a fitness trainer and owner of weight loss centers and personal training studios. During his years as a fitness leader, Jon describes feeling pressure to demonstrate more knowledge about the human body than he actually possessed (Stapleton, 2012). With each passing year in the fitness industry, Mr. Brasso wished for a more honest approach to supporting his family. Then, as he describes in an interview with Susan Stapleton (2012), something fateful happened. Mr. Brasso was sued by a hamburger chain in Los Angeles that had the same name as his fitness studios. His fitness studios were called the “In and Out Workout Studios.” After a year and a half of legal battles, Jon realized he could not singularly beat the enormous legal team representing the hamburger establishment and Mr. Brasso sold his fitness chains. This legal challenge was accepted as an opportunity to re-invent his business and career. From here, Mr. Brasso would start a business based on honesty and in 2005 he opened The Heart Attack Grill in Chandler Arizona (Canadian Business, 2010). In October 2011, as the restaurant grew, he made the choice to relocate The Heart Attack Grill from Arizona to Downtown Las Vegas.

The story behind the restaurant’s beginning is not the only unique aspect to this eatery. The restaurant’s motto, a “Taste Worth Dying for,” is unique. The restaurant’s hospital theme is unique. Not only is an ambulance parked in front of the restaurant, food is identified as single, double, triple or quadruple bypass burgers served with flat liner fries cooked in pure lard. The waitresses are called nurses. The customers are called patients who put on a medical gown before ordering their food. Finally, the restaurant’s marketing strategy may be the most unique aspect of this organization. The restaurant advertises a free meal to anyone over 350 pounds and Mr. Brasso, communicates in writing and in person that the food served at his establishment is not healthy and could ultimately kill you. It is interesting to experience the conflicting restaurant themes of glutinous food and medical care. The unique combination can make for a truly interesting dining experience. An experience that is more than food but also, entertainment. Mr. Basso, states that, “the restaurant is a dinner theater and the burger is the price of admission,” (J. Basso, personal communication, May 6, 2017).

Many restaurants serve food that is not supportive of a healthy lifestyle. But, why does the Heart Attack Grill receive so much attention regarding this topic? In part it is due to the owner, Mr. Basso’s unique marketing strategy and creative entrepreneurial spirit. Begin with the name, The Heart Attack Grill. The name communicates that the food is not healthy and could literally contribute to a heart attack. But, the name can also communicate humor. Clearly, the name is intended to convey fun. Mr. Basso told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, “Burgers and fries are the No. 1 and No. 2 most consumed foods in the world. You want to compete selling the most ubiquitous commodity out there you’ve got to have an edge. I consciously decided that my edge would be total, bleak and constant truth. We’re the only restaurant in America telling you that this is bad for you.” And with honesty about the negative health value of their food, the Heart Attack Grill turns the negatives of bad foods into positive PR by celebrating the very unhealthy aspects of their dishes (Furniture Today, 2012).

Mr. Brasso’s marketing strategy is not just interesting. The strategy has contributed to restaurant success within many categories. First, Mr. Brasso has not spent a dollar on advertising for his restaurant (Edelhauser, 2007) and the restaurant is ranked #202 out of 3884 restaurants in

Las Vegas by tripadvisor in 2017. So the marketing strategy is self-supporting and people are not only visiting the restaurant, they are rating the restaurant experience highly.

But, Mr. Brasso's uncommon business honesty is not appreciated by all. The restaurant has experienced controversy and criticism. Many consider menu items like the Quadruple Bypass Burger with 9,982 calories per burger to be excessive. In addition, in 2010, "the Physicians Committee told the Heart Attack Grill that it should declare moral bankruptcy and close up shop-or transform its menu (Good Medicine, 2013). Finally, two unofficial spokesmen have died, 575 pound Blair River (29 years old) died of flu related pneumonia on March 2011 and John Alleman (52 years old) died of a heart attack on February 11, 2013 (Bly, 2013). Some feel the humor in the restaurant is not worth the possible negative health consequences.

So, it can be concluded that The Heart Attack Grill has positive and negative aspects. As a positive, Mr. Jon Basso's strategy of unapologetic honesty is working for his restaurant and generating revenue. As a negative, some individuals clearly take unbridged with the lard based food as concern for ethical eatery establishment responsibilities. The following case study will provide an overview of The Heart Attack Grill's most unique aspect, the marketing strategy, followed by an introduction of the issues, case questions for class discussion, brief analysis of case questions and conclusions.

UNIQUE MARKETING STRATEGY

Consider the basic Marketing Mix, the four P's, product, price, place and promotion.

Product	Price	Place	Promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand name • Variety • Features • Packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum retail price • Discounts • Pricing terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution channels • Inventories • Locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct marketing • Public Relations • Sales promotion • Advertising

Many organizations scan their environment and apply tried and true Marketing Mix practices. As an example, consider a surface and simplistic review of the McDonalds Restaurant marketing plan. The restaurant has an established brand name and offers a variety of foods based on the food interests of the target customer. The pricing is competitive, locations are numerous and advertising targets youth. Often a marketer or executive can study a tried and true marketing plan like McDonalds and create a modified version to support their restaurant's specific goals and food. Regardless of plan, all four, product, price, promotion and place should be analyzed to support the needs and interests of the organization's specific target market.

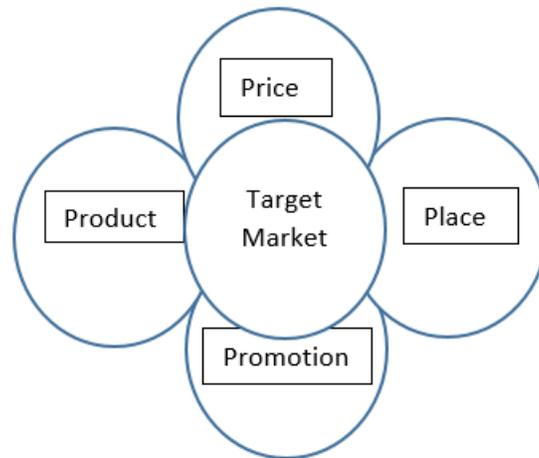


Figure 1: Marketing Mix

However, Jon Brasso does not comprehensively apply traditional marketing plans to his business. For The Heart Attack Grill, the product is somewhat common, hamburger, hotdog, French fries and shakes. The burgers are priced reasonably for a sit down dinner ranging from about \$10 - \$25 per individual meal. The restaurant, place, is located in downtown Las Vegas and this is an inviting and welcoming environment. So, in terms of product, price and place, the restaurant is reasonably common. But, it is in the area of promotion that the marketing plan becomes unique. The hospital theme and highly visible and separates The Heart Attack Grill from other sit-down restaurant grills. In addition, Brasso describes refusing to give into diet wars, all food is full of sugar and not a vegetable on any of the plates. Brasso explains that the restaurant maintains a party feel, “Because if you’re going to party, enjoy yourself. That’s really the message” (Edelhauser, 2007). The focus on fun creates an atmosphere that is closer to a dinner theater than traditional restaurant. Brasso communicates, “we are a dinner theater, and the burger is the price one pays for admission,” (J. Brasso, personal communication May 6, 2017). So, the food is not the only product served at the restaurant, certainly the environment is part of The Heart Attack Grills product mix.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ISSUES

The Heart Attack Grill is fun. The restaurant is entertaining and serves traditional American cuisine. So, what is the issue? One issue that continues to present itself is the conflicting perspectives regarding restaurant responsibility. On one hand people say, this is a fun restaurant and you can choose to, or not to, eat at this restaurant. On the other hand, people say, restaurants that serve unhealthy food are contributing to the current obesity epidemic in the United States. The following case will discuss whether a restaurant, operating in a free market society, is responsible for the food choices of its patrons. Two competing perspectives will be explored. The first perspective is an individual or organization has the right to create and sell a product. The second perspective is an individual or organization has the responsibility to create and sell a product that supports health and life for the customers.

Free Markets

On one hand, in a free market society, an individual has the right to create and sell a product. The free market ideology can be summarized as the markets are always good and government regulations are bad. In a true free market system, the forces of supply and demand are free from manipulation from the government or other authority. There are underlying ideas that success goes to those producing the most value, individual choice will maximize growth for the economy as a whole and it is good to promote business because business growth lifts the economy and all people. In this system, businesses that can meet a consumer demand have great potential. In the area of food, many consumers demand large portions of greasy entrees. This is evident with the number of thriving fast food chains and restaurants that market their products based on large portions.

There are individuals, researchers, theologians, etc. that have discussed and documented the value of a free market. In a report by GlobeScan, based on 12,884 interviews in 25 countries, participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement that the “free market economy is the best system on which to base the future of the world.” Americans strongly agreed at 59% (Strachan, 2011). “A new Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey finds that 83% of likely U.S. voters think policies that allow and encourage free market competition are important for the economy, including 49% who think they’re very important” (Rasmussen Reports, October 29, 2015). Father Robert A. Sirico, in his book, *The Moral Case for a Free Economy*, argues that a free economy promotes charity, selflessness and kindness, going on to say, that free-market capitalism is not only the best way to ensure individual success and national prosperity, but it is also the surest route to a moral and socially just society (Sirico, 2012).

Free Markets have long been viewed in this light. In Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, Smith clarifies the benefits of the “Invisible Hand” for individuals and societies. In addition, Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (1962), argues that economic freedom is a precondition necessary for political freedom. While, Dr. Zupan, Dean and Professor Economics and Public Policy at the University of Rochester’s School of Business has found that a free market fosters integrity and trust (Zupan, 2011).

So, research, support a free-market, but do actions? In many scenarios, yes. Consider the actions of hospitals. A hospital should offer one of the healthiest environment available. Yet, many hospitals are offering fast food to hospital patrons. Clearly, fast food is not aligned with healthy outcomes. Hospitals must offer fast food restaurants within the hospital building because either there is a demand for the fast food by the hospital employees and patients, or the fast food restaurants are financially lucrative enough that their presence makes financial sense. “Physicians Committee dieticians found that many children’s hospital cafeterias and patient menus are dominated by foods high in fat, cholesterol, calories, sugar, and sodium,” (Good Medicine, 2013). Children’s Hospitals throughout the country have fast food outlets within the hospital:

- Shands Hospital for Children at University of Florida, Gainesville Florida- Five Fast Food Outlets
- Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt, Nashville, Tennessee- Four Fast Food Outlets
- St. Louis Children’s Hospital-Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri- Two Fast Food Outlets

- Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Los Angeles California- McDonalds on first floor and patient menu featuring pizza and hot dogs.
- Riley Hospital for Children-Indiana University Health, Indianapolis, Indiana- McDonalds in hospital and patient menu features sausage, bacon and corn dogs

Free markets allow for American workers to specialize in goods and services and then exchange their goods and services for other American goods and services. With opportunity comes innovation and improvements. The Heart Attack Grill, is a service that Jon Brasso developed. The restaurant employs cooks, servers, waitresses, cleaning staff, etc. The restaurant purchases materials and supplies and the restaurant offers a service to the patrons. Simply, the restaurant is thriving due to the consumer demand.

Restaurant Menu Options and Social Responsibility

On the other hand, in regards to the restaurants' menu, for some, The Heart Attack Grill introduces controversy. Recall that menu's items, like the, Quadruple Bypass Burger contain nearly 10,000 calories and two unofficial Heart Attack Grill spokesmen have died. Further, in 2012, a 40-year-old man had a heart attack while eating the triple bypass burger (Owens, 2012) and a woman suffering an apparent heart attack while eating one of the restaurant's burgers (QMI, 2012). In response, the Physicians Committee has urged the Las Vegas Department of Planning to either shut the restaurant down or revamp its menu and name" (Good Medicine, 2013).

The Physicians Committee and other medical professionals have expressed concern about health related issues that develop from eating fat filled food. The concern is that the food leads to obesity and obesity leads to negative health consequences. In the United States there are approximately 300,000 obesity related deaths each year (Falit, n.d.). In the US alone, over 90 million individuals have obesity (Bariatric Times, 2017). And obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time reaching costs of \$200 billion per year (Bariatric Times, 2017).

But, isn't food consumption a private issue? There is nothing society can do to intervene and minimize health issues caused by diet. Right? Not necessarily. Research is generating information that the foodservice industry has some impact and influence over the increasing obesity rates. "Data from the California Health Interview Survey shows that fast-food consumption and overweight/obesity rates have increased from 2007 to 2011/2012 in all areas," (Sturm and Hattori, 2015). So, with proximity to unhealthy food, obesity increases. And increases in obesity drive up societal medical costs. "Costs associated with obesity pose a severe threat to the U.S. economy. Evidence indicates that foodservice industry has had a major role contributing to the obesity crisis: thus it is argued that the industry has an ethical and social responsibility to now aggressively adopt socially responsibility actions that will help alleviate the increasing incidence of obesity (McCool and McCool, 2010).

The relationships between fat-heavy food and obesity is not only observed in the US, this is an issues that can be observed globally. Countries that had avoided large scale obesity in the past, are experiencing increased rates of obesity as more and more fast food restaurants become available. Studies have linked fast food with obesity risk in China (Youfa, Liang, Hong and Weidong, 2016), India (Joseph et al, 2015), Africa (Feeley and Norris, 2014) and South Korea

(Braithwaite, 2014) to name a few. So, there is a correlation between availability of unhealthy food and obesity. Consider these conclusions:

1. Proximity to unhealthy food contributes to obesity.
2. Obesity is becoming an epidemic.
3. Epidemics comprehensively impact societies.

As we are all impacted by the obesity epidemic, is minimizing to managing obesity a societal issue? Is minimizing or managing the obesity epidemic the food service industry's responsibility?

Many, authors, researchers, politicians and individuals feel that it is the responsibility of the food service industries to prepare food that is in the best interest of society. In an article in the Washington Post, Deborah Cohen writes, "The food industry spends billions of dollars each year to develop products, packaging, advertising and marketing techniques that entice us to buy more food because selling more food means making more profits" (Cohen, 2007). Author, Susan Okie states in her book, "Fed Up! Winning the War Against Childhood Obesity," that in the Fall of 2003, the director of the CDC declared obesity the number one health threat in the US and if obesity is the greatest threat facing our country today, the food industry must start acting more responsibly.

In the research article, "Solutions to obesity: perspectives from the food industry" the authors state "The food industry should help the consumer make healthy food choices" (Verduin, Agarwal and Waltman, 2005). Researcher, Roland Sturm, is in agreement. Dr. Sturm is a senior economist at the RAND Corporation and a professor of policy analysis at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. He reviewed all of the available research for a study published in California Cancer Journal for Clinicians and concluded "...the main reason we're getting fatter – all of us – is because we are surrounded by tasty temptations that cost very little, from fast food menus to processed snack foods," (Carroll, 2014).

Individual citizens recognize the concern and have begun to take action against restaurants that they perceive to be offering injustice with their menus. McDonald's has been accused of drawing in children with their signature play places and happy meals (Stanish, 2010). And a McDonald's franchise manager was awarded \$17,500 in damages, after the 32-year-old man sued McDonald's for making him fat (Rohrlich, 2010). Individuals are shifting blame for obesity from themselves, with success and support, to the food service industry.

On a large scale, researchers, politicians, individuals and the legal system are requesting the food service industry to make responsible choices that support a healthy lifestyle for our society. To manage a large scale obesity epidemic, it is likely that a large scale effort must be launched and everyone must have the goal of reducing dangerous food options.

CASE QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

What responsibility does the food service industry have regarding the obesity epidemic? Can a business professional with a unique idea operate freely in a free market? There are no absolute answers to these questions but professionals in industries from marketing, management, economics, employment law and human resources have interest in this topic.

In preparing to discuss the issues of free markets and social responsibility, consider the two poles of the Western Political spectrum, Robert Nozick with laissez-faire liberalism and John Rawls with welfare liberalism (Srinivasan, 2013). Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* and Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and are generally considered as two of the great, classics in

twentieth-century analytic political philosophy. Nozick supports an entitlement theory that views humans as their own protectors where redistribution of goods should only occur with the consent of the individual. In other words, we have the right and ability to earn for and protect ourselves. John Rawls on the other hand argues that the most reasonable principles of justice are those where everyone accepts and agrees upon a fair position. In other words, people have the basic capacity to fully participate in a system of mutual cooperation's. A brief overview of Nozick's and Rawl's theories will follow.

Robert Nozick, published his book, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* in 1974. Nozick believes that "society was simply one that resulted from an unfettered free market- and that the only legitimate function of the state was to ensure the workings of the free market by enforcing contracts and protecting citizens against violence, theft and fraud (Srinivasan, 2013). Nozick argues that respect of individual rights is the key standard for assessing action. In other words, if someone has the ability to produce a good or service that is in demand and others will pay for, the individual has the right to make money. The only legitimate state is a minimal state that restricts its activities to the protection of the rights of life, liberty, property and contract. There are four main topics discussed in the *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. (1) the underpinning and robustness of moral rights that constitute the basic normative framework of *Anarchy, State and Utopia*; (2) the defense of the minimal state against the charge of individualist anarchist (3) historical entitlement doctrine of justice in holdings and his associated critique of end-state and patterned doctrines of distributive justice; and (4) the argument that utopian aspirations provide a complementary route to the vindication of the minimal state (Mack, Summer, 2015).

Now consider, John Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice* published in 1971. In this book, Rawls, describes justice as created from a fair and impartial point and for this to occur, each member of society should see themselves as free and equal persons who collectively support principles of social and political justice. To uphold impartial thinking, individuals must go behind the "veil of ignorance" to ensure impartial judgment. Behind the veil of ignorance" people are deprived of knowledge regarding characteristics such as gender, age, wealth, talents, ethnicity and education would be in the imagined society. Behind this veil, we can't understand or know our particular position in society whether rich or poor, black or white, religious or atheist. When we remove these boundaries we remove personal bias. And because the future is unknown, Rawls believes rational people would select a society of guaranteed basic rights and equal opportunity. Rawls concludes in the following principles of justice: first, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar scheme of liberties for others, right to voice, hold office, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to assembly, freedom to hold personal property. Second, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged. We should identify economic inequalities by first imagining a perfect state of equality. We only deviate from the perfect state of equality if the least advantaged in the new state of inequality is better off than they would be without the deviation.

This case will offer nine questions for discussion. Four questions from Nozick, two from Rawls and three from the author regarding The Heart Attack Grill. The questions from Nozick and Rawls are intended to help orient the reader in terms of their own perspectives regarding free markets and social responsibility. From an understanding of personal perspective, consider the real world application to The Heart Attack Grill.

Anarchy, State and Utopia

The case study questions are from the four premises offered by Robert Nozick in his book *Anarchy, State and Utopia*.

1. Is any exchange between two people in the absence of direct physical compulsion by one party against the other (or the threat thereof) necessarily free?
2. Is any free (not physically compelled) exchange morally permissible?
3. Do people deserve all they are able, and only what they are able, to get through free exchange?
4. Are people under no obligation to do anything they don't freely want to do or freely commit themselves to doing?

Theory of Justice

The case study questions are from key premises from John Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice*.

1. Does each person have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar scheme of liberties for others, right to voice, hold office, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to assembly, freedom to hold personal property?
2. Should social and economic inequalities be arranged so that they are to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity?

Application to The Heart Attack Grill

The case study questions are from the author. Apply your perspective regarding free markets and social responsibility to answer questions regarding The Heart Attack Grill.

1. How important is Jon Brasso' unique perspective regarding marketing and business to the success of The Heart Attack Grill?
2. Could the restaurant experience the same success with a different marketing strategy? With a different menu?
3. There is a demand for the restaurant, is this sufficient to support operation?

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF CASE QUESTIONS

Robert Nozick

1. Is any exchange between two people in the absence of direct physical compulsion by one party against the other (or the threat thereof) necessarily free?

If you say yes, you take the position that individuals are not coerced if they are not physical intimidated to action and when people have free choice, they accept full responsibility for their own choices. As in the case of a person choosing to eat food that is known to be unhealthy, this is the choice of the individual and the individual is responsible for the consequences. If you say no, you recognize that individuals can experience coercion without physical threats. As an example, a child may be coerced to select unhealthy food because the food comes with a desirable toy.

2. Is any free (not physically compelled) exchange morally permissible?

If you say yes, then you think any free exchange cannot be exploitative or immoral, provided all parties agree to an exchange, the exchange is moral. As an example, if someone sells an ordinary hamburger for \$200 and the other party chooses to purchase the food item, and there was no coercion, the exchange is moral. If you say no, you feel that even if all parties agree to an exchange, one of the parties could be exploited. Consider the same \$200 hamburger exchange. Someone is selling an ordinary hamburger for \$200, even if the other party agrees, you would perceive this as exploitive because the ordinary hamburger has nowhere near the value of \$200.

3. Do people deserve all they are able, and only what they are able, to get through free exchange?

If you say yes, you believe all people have equal access to luck, health care, education, etc. If all people have equal chance of success, they deserve what they earn or receive. You would uphold the perspective that if we have a “dream” we should define it and go for it. If you say no, you do not think all people have equal access to opportunities to achieve. Therefore, some people are born into a better position in life to achieve than others. As examples an individual may be more successful because their parents have more money or they have greater access to health care. You recognize that many talented people like Van Gogh, Schubert and Edgar Allan Poe had amazing talents, but due to circumstances beyond their control they did not achieve financial success in their lifetime.

4. Are people under no obligation to do anything they don't freely want to do or freely commit themselves to doing?

If you say yes, then you think the only moral requirements are the ones we freely bring on ourselves. We have the ability to enter into and make promises and contracts based on what we want or do not want. For example, consider you are fishing. You see a child drowning in the lake next to you. You do not want to get wet and you want to continue fishing so you offer no help. If you say no, you believe there are some underlying basic moral contracts that we are all required to uphold because we live in a society. Consider the same fishing scenario. You see a child drowning in the lake next to you. You would perceive that you have a moral obligation to try to help someone in need even if this is outside of your daily plan.

John Rawls

1. Does each person have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar scheme of liberties for others, right to voice, hold office, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to assembly, freedom to hold personal property?

If you say yes, you feel that justice is the first virtue of social institutions and if an institution is unjust it should be ended. Further, you support the idea that society is a cooperative venture that involves unity and mutual advantage and through cooperation we create a better life. If you say no, you may be in conflict with this idea or you may simply consider the idea of a comprehensive responsibility for society unrealistic or unlikely to occur due to great diversity regarding perspectives on principles of just or unjust.

1. Should social and economic inequalities be arranged so that they are to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity?

If you say yes, you assume in a perfectly just society in which everyone acts ethically and upholds institutions; there is no civil disobedience and this would provide a standard to assess the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society and all individuals within the society are rational and mutually interested in the mutual gain of the group. If you say no, you may perceive that the reality of all people wanting to work for the collective interest is impossible. Further, you may perceive that there is an element of the “survival of the fittest.” Meaning individuals achieve because they are the smartest and strongest and therefore they are the best qualified to make decisions and distribute resources.

Additional Questions Regarding The Heart Attack Grill

1. How important is Jon Brasso’ unique perspective regarding marketing and business to the success of The Heart Attack Grill?
2. Could the restaurant experience the same success with a different marketing strategy? With a different menu?
3. There is a demand for the restaurant, is this sufficient to support business operation?

The author is questioning whether the food industry has the responsibility of fighting the obesity epidemic and whether or not, entrepreneurs like Mr. Brasso have simply identified a unique restaurant niche and combined their idea with a brilliant marketing strategy. Where does Mr. Brasso’s strategy fit within the ideas of free market and social responsibility? Does The Heart Attack Grill have greater responsibility for the obesity epidemic in the United States? Or is this restaurant simply operating in a market-driven economy that causes industry to act in the interest of maximizing profits? One’s answers to these questions is likely align with their perspective on a free-market.

CONCLUSION

The Heart Attack Grill has started by Jon Brasso in 2005. He wanted a business with a foundation in complete and total honesty. And this foundation was the starting point for his restaurant. The name, the theme, the motto all convey dual messages of unhealthy food and collective fun. He unapologetically communicates these two messages. His business is employing people, contributing to the Las Vegas economy and is feeding patrons. The restaurant is aligned with concepts communicated by many economists, supporting the idea that it is a market driven economy that causes industry to act in the interests of maximizing profits and that society cannot depend on the food industry to address obesity voluntarily (Ludwig and Nestle, 2008). Does Mr. Brasso have a greater responsibility than he is already upholding?

Nicole Scott, JD, discusses where the responsibility for obesity may fall in her article, “Saving Us from Ourselves: The Government’s Role in Obesity and Personal Responsibility. In her article she outlines the progression of some of significant obesity legislation. She concludes, that the food industry should act in a responsible manner but the first step is clarity and communication of nutritional information (Scott, 2012). There are many researchers in support of communication of nutritional information as a good first step, to curtailing the obesity crises.

Peter Ubel, MD, believes “The simplest thing the government can do is inform us about our eating choices more, so we can decide what we want to eat” (Clark, 2013).

In addition, other researchers are suggesting that there can be individual and group responsibility for the obesity crisis. Researchers, Brownell, Kersh, Ludwig, Post, Puhl, Schwartz and Willet, in their article, “Personal responsibility and obesity: A constructive approach to a controversial issue” state,

“The challenge is to combine personal and collective responsibility approaches in ways that best serve the public good. This begins with viewing these approaches as complementary, if not synergistic, and recognizing the conditions can be changed to create more optimal defaults that support informed and responsible decisions and hence enhance personal freedoms” (Brownell, Kersh, Ludwig, Post, Puhl, Schwartz and Willet, 2010).

With this idea, individuals have a responsibility and the community has responsibility to manage obesity. Everyone must work together to end obesity, not just the community or just the individual.

Clearly researchers are coming to solutions that include increased communication and group collaboration to address obesity. But, do most citizens in the US blame the restaurants and the food service industry for the obesity crisis? An online survey was administered by Clear Voice Research whose registry of panelists is representative of the U.S. population in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, gender and region. Participants were asked “Who is to blame for the rise in obesity?” And the survey revealed that most people believe individuals are to blame for their own obesity- not restaurants, grocery stores, farmers or government policy. Of the more than 800 people in the United States who took the survey, with 774 were usable, results showed that 94 percent of the people believed individuals are primarily or somewhat to blame for the rise in obesity with parents coming in second at 91 percent primarily or somewhat to blame (Lusk and Ellison, 2013).

While the food service industry can be a contributor to obesity, certainly numerous studies support that there are actually many combined factors that collectively cause obesity like food choices, lack of exercise, genetic disposition and environment. Could it be that society does have to work together to for the betterment of each individual but this does not mean we make choices for each other rather, plenty of information is offered so individuals can make informed choices for themselves? Couldn't we agree, with complete honesty Mr. Brasso, is offering all the opportunity to make an informed choice? Isn't this sufficient in terms of social responsibility? Consider the concluding ideas of Dr. Roland Strom, in regards to the obesity epidemic, "It might be enough to start changing social norms. In half a decade smoking changed dramatically. Though we can't say that's all because of taxes and indoor smoking limits, those tweaks probably helped” (Carrol, 2014).

OPTIONAL CASE STUDY CONCLUSION WORKSHEET

The following worksheet will allow for a brief summary of Yes or No responses to the case study questions.

<u>Nozick</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Is any exchange between two people in the absence of direct physical compulsion by one party against the other (or the threat thereof) necessarily free?		
Is any free (not physically compelled) exchange morally permissible?		
Do people deserve all they are able, and only what they are able, to get through free exchange?		
Are people under no obligation to do anything they don't freely want to do or freely commit themselves to doing?		

<u>Rawls</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Does each person have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar scheme of liberties for others, right to voice, hold office, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to assembly, freedom to hold personal property?		
Should social and economic inequalities be arranged so that they are to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity?		

Based on the number of Yes or No responses, are you more aligned with Nozick's "unfettered free market" or Rawls *Theory of Justice*? How does your perspective influence your ideas about The Heart Attack Grill?

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