

# **HASSEL AVILES**

**Mental Health Advocate | Speaker | Hospitality Consultant**

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Mental health advocate Hassel Aviles has spent almost 25 years in Toronto's hospitality and culinary industry. An F&B veteran, Hassel cut her teeth working demanding front-of-house jobs: pouring beers at dive bars, braving brunch rushes and catering opulent weddings. She then shifted into the organizational side of the industry, planning some of Toronto's largest food events, curating culinary activations and consulting for restaurants and brands. Despite her career successes, two decades of work in this sector had left Hassel feeling depleted and devalued.

Struggling with anxiety and depression, Hassel was inspired to co-found Not 9 to 5, a non-profit that empowers foodservice service workers like herself. As Not 9 to 5's Executive Director, this industry vanguard has made it her mission to dismantle the brigade system, so hospitality and restaurant workers can thrive. The organization provides support for mental health and substance use by mobilizing educational resources and creating safe space communities.

Hassel's strategic planning abilities helped grow Not 9 to 5 from a series of workshops, panels and webinars into a global vehicle for change. Now, with CNECTing – Not 9 to 5's online educational platform, Hassel aspires to start a world-wide hospitality revolution to create work environments that are inclusive and proactive, rather than top-down and reactive.

This is not the first time Hassel leveraged her industry experience to make great things happen. In 2011, she took the leap into events by launching Toronto Underground Market (TUM). For three years, Hassel hosted this 2,200-person monthly culinary event, designed as an incubator for food entrepreneurs, chefs and home cooks.

Always the multitasker, Hassel was simultaneously working to build La Carnita (a TUM-born restaurant that she co-created) into a multinational restaurant franchise that now grosses a seven-figure revenue. Although she is no longer affiliated with La Carnita, through her work as a consultant, Hassel has helped launch many successful brands. Most recently, she's worked with Charlotte Langley of Scout and produced a widely-successful self-published cookbook, *Cooking From Home*.

Since TUM, Hassel has organized numerous successful food events, among them Field Trip and Feeding 5000. These large-scale festivals fed thousands and wrestled with the logistics of chefs cooking offsite. Restaurants Canada was another planning triumph: Hassel oversaw dozens of activations and demonstrations over the three-day, 20,000-guest attended event.

In her current position at Reunion Inc., Hassel is a Principal Consultant heading all hospitality and culinary work. Reunion Inc., an Ovare Group-owned business transformation consultancy, has helped companies such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Pusateri's and The Drake with various strategic initiatives. A pillar of Hassel's work at Reunion Inc. is to prioritize the individuals that make up these companies.

Whether it's speaking to students at George Brown College or OCAD, moderating a series of panels for the James Beard Foundation, or hosting culinary experiences in half a dozen shipping containers for thousands to eat and drink from at the RC Show, Hassel's passion for everything hospitality and culinary continues to push her to evolve industry norms.

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