

Shari Steinbach, MS RDN



What is your job title?

Owner/President, Shari Steinbach & Associates, LLC

Where do you work (setting and/or company)?

Consultant to supermarkets, retail industry, food commodities and food manufacturers.

How long have you been at this job?

4 years

Please describe your job (including typical role, population served and anything else you feel is important in understanding the job):

Let me start by sharing how I started working in the grocery industry. My first job was as a clinical dietitian at Hackley Hospital in Muskegon where I quickly discovered my true joy was in preventative nutrition and wellness. The hospital created a wellness program and I became the wellness dietitian, working with an exercise physiologist. We taught community classes and worked with a lot of local businesses. We also developed a partnership with a local supermarket called Plumb's, where we created the "Hackley for Health" shelf labeling program which pointed out the healthier foods in the store. This work led me to my "aha" moment! I felt the supermarket was an ideal place to teach people about nutrition. If they could learn to shop well and cook well, they would eat well.

When the hospital started downsizing I became aware that Spartan Stores (now SpartanNash) was looking for a dietitian. I got the job and that is where I truly learned about the retail industry. It was a big learning curve. I was one of only a few dietitians working in retail across the country at that time. I advanced to the role of Director of Consumer Affairs and led the customer service team, community giving and wellness. After 13+ years at Spartan went to Meijer to lead their wellness initiatives and was able to hire 5 additional RDNs during my 13+ years there. Our job accountabilities included community outreach and education, media segments, content writing for the website, social media, in store events and serving as internal nutrition experts. We were always using our expertise to help Meijer with "solution selling". Showing customers how to use the products in our stores for a healthier life. Our team had a varied background which helped us be able to address several areas within the company from culinary to fitness.

My years in retail allowed me to establish many wonderful relationships with food companies and commodities and I was also able to travel to some amazing places to learn about food production, agriculture and retail. It was these connections that made it easy for me to move into consulting. For the past 4 years I have been on my own and work with a wonderful group

of clients including Michigan Apples, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Nestle, the Retail Dietitian Business Alliance, the Food Marketing Institute, and many more.

Does your job require any additional schooling or education?

Although I didn't need additional schooling for my role in retail, I was working on my Master's degree when I entered these roles and made sure I took marketing classes. There weren't any organizations that taught us about the retail business, you just had to learn as you went. RDNs who are interested in retail now have a fantastic organization they can join for free - the Retail Dietitian Business Alliance (RDBA). They exist to educate dietitians about being successful in the retail industry from a business skills perspective. Anyone can join at www.retaildietitians.com.

What are possible places of employment for your position?

There are several hundred dietitians now working in supermarket chains across the country, as well as in other countries. These are fairly new positions so they are still evolving. The challenge is to educate the leadership at these companies to understand the value an RDN can bring to the business. You truly have to show the ROI that you can provide.

What is your favorite thing about your job?

I love being able to teach people how to shop and cook so they can prepare easy, affordable, tasty and healthy meals at home. I have learned that meals typically need to be easy and affordable first or consumers will not make them. Lack of time is a huge barrier for most people.

What is your educational background?

I got my Bachelor's degree in dietetics from Central Michigan University and then did the Tri-City internship (now the CMU intern program). I received my Master's in human nutrition from Andrews University.

Do you do any volunteer work?

I volunteer with the Food and Culinary Practice Group of the Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics. Within that group they also have a Supermarket RD Subgroup which I did chair for 2 years. I am also currently on the planning committee with MiAND to try and develop relationships/sponsorships with food companies and Michigan food commodity groups.

Why did you decide to become an RD?

I was always interested in wellness and food. When I saw the dietitian option at CMU I just went for it.

What do you think are the most important things for students and/or new RDs to know?

Find your passion in the dietetics field. There are so many specialized areas now and given time you will find your niche. Listen to your heart and design a career you love!

What areas in dietetics do you think will become more important/growing in the future?

I believe we will see nutrition professionals as part of all food and food retail companies. Consumers today are very focused on eating at home and staying healthy and they need guidance to do so. Dietitians can help food retailers be successful and sell more products as they provide “educational selling techniques.” We also have to remember that people are buying more food online so many of the educational efforts will revolve around digital solutions.