

## malik's sweet spot

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**Mentor:** Malik Armstead

**Age:** 29

**Occupation:** Owner and executive chef, Five Spot, Brooklyn, New York

**Accomplishment:** Taking the leap to start his own successful restaurant

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### ever since malik armstead sold snacks

to hungry classmates in high school, he wanted to open his own business. Armstead continued to develop his entrepreneurial drive with help from the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), a nonprofit group that teaches inner-city youths to run businesses. After graduating from Morehouse College with a degree in finance in 1993, Armstead worked as a Wall Street analyst for a couple of years, but his dream of working for himself remained strong. So in 1996, he took the leap and spent \$30,000 of his own money to open a soul food restaurant, Five Spot, in Brooklyn. It was an immediate success; Armstead made his original investment back in less than six months, and recently expanded the restaurant to include a bar. We talked to Armstead about how finding focus, taking risks, and making sacrifices put him on the road to success.

**FIND FOCUS** Three years out of college, Armstead found that he was fed up with Wall Street politics, so he quit his job at Morgan Stanley to start his own business. “I was 24 years old with two years of work experience,” he recalls. “On paper, [what I was doing] didn’t make any sense. But I believed in myself and knew that it could work.” Armstead also knew enough to follow two basic business tenets as he chose a direction for his venture—evaluate your resources, and do something you know. “I had to look at the human resources I had within myself as well as what close friends and family could add to the venture. I come from a family of cooks, so I was really confident going into the business.” The first day Five Spot opened, there was a line out the door to get a table. “We’ve been successful mainly through word of mouth,” he says.

**TAKE RISKS** Like many entrepreneurs, Armstead risked everything when he used his own money to start his business. He allowed himself six months to launch the restaurant, mainly because that’s how long his unemployment insurance would hold out. “I understood how risky the idea was,” he says. “But I also knew I could get a job somewhere else if it didn’t work out. Still, I really didn’t talk to family members about it. It was such a risky thing, and I didn’t want to be discouraged.” He was buoyed by the idea of making it all happen himself. “It was myself, my brother, and my fiancée. We mopped floors, delivered food, waited on customers. Then we just added more employees as we went along. I believe in taking baby steps in a business.”

**MAKE SACRIFICES** Armstead makes sacrifices every day to keep his restaurant up and running. Five Spot is open seven days a week, and as the owner and executive chef, Armstead logs 12 to 15 hours a day, every day. “It requires an extreme amount of sacrifice and devotion,” he says. He misses out on time spent with friends and family members, as well as time for himself. “Running a business is like having a baby that can’t be neglected. It takes a lot of love and care. There were definitely times when I wished I was doing something else.” But when all is said and done, he says, it’s worth it. When he feels squeezed by business pressures, Armstead looks back at all he has achieved. “I come from humble beginnings, and that helps put things in perspective. I’ve come so far.”

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Go to [www.experience.com/armstead](http://www.experience.com/armstead) to read “Rockefellers in the ‘Hood,” an article from *Forbes* magazine about the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship.