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Synthesis

# Egon Zehnder's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fresh Start Executive Forum Breakfast

*Feeding it Forward: Face the Future of  
Personalized Nutrition*

By Alejandro Folmer and Jason Hecker

**EgonZehnder**

# Feeding it Forward: Face the Future of Personalized Nutrition

As food industry leaders continue to understand the power and potential of personalized nutrition, they are challenged with bringing together two very distinct and often unique skillsets required to successfully navigate this industry movement: scientific expertise and marketing prowess. It's now more critical than ever for leaders to effectively merge cultures and capabilities in new ways, accounting for the explosion of data and revolutionary research within the industry. They must also consider the human nature of their customers and competitive dichotomies that bring both regulatory and reputation challenges.

At Egon Zehnder's second annual Fresh Start Executive Forum Breakfast in New Orleans, leaders gathered to discuss the future of personalized nutrition and the need for an interdisciplinary approach.

The breakfast was hosted by Alejandro Folmer, Consultant and AgroFood Leader and Jason Hecker, Consultant and AgroFood Leader, who also served as moderator. The distinguished panelists included:

- Rachel Cheatham, Founder & CEO, Foodscape Group, LLC
- Dr. Mario Ferruzzi, Professor of Food Science and Nutrition, North Carolina State University
- Alan Murray, CEO, NextFoods Inc.

Several key insights on the future of personalized nutrition were shared:

**Consumers are at the heart of personalized nutrition.** They are shaping the journey and how the industry approaches it, driving the need for both technology and modern science but also looking to tradition and relationships as source of truth. Whether they realize it or not, they have come to expect products backed by science and tradition and want to know that the industry leaders are working to balance the two in a transparent and simple way that is easy for them to understand. For example, consider sour dough bread, which is known to be a long-standing

traditional bread that goes back thousands of years even before the discovery of yeast. Making a comeback, bread makers have modernized their recipe for today's food standards, but also maintain the most ancient sour doughs, to integrate nostalgic flavor profiles and emotional connection. In addition, with consumer gut health being the epicenter of research and information, as well as the emotional and human side of food itself, defining health and putting brackets around it is challenging and will continue to be challenging in the years to come.

**Data is only as valuable as the partnerships and consumer behaviors behind it.** When it comes to ownership of data and information, there is complexity that will require new partnerships and approaches that consumers will trust and appreciate. It will be up to today's leaders to establish the right teams that understand how to capture value by bringing together the right data and elements that personalize nutrition effectively. However, on the flip side, data can inform the right decisions, but in and of itself, may not change consumer behavior. Successful leaders will understand that they must look beyond the data and consider the consumer emotion behind it.

**Truthful, transparent and genuine communication is needed.** Today's leaders must consider how their companies communicate with consumers from all walks of life. They must look beyond the back label and participate in the communities that form around nutrition today. Whether an online community debating the merits of ingredients, or an entrepreneur speaking passionately about their product, conversations are happening with or without food companies. Approaching communication with an interdisciplinary team that brings together different vantage points, including scientists and marketers, will be critical. And, as misinformation continues to be the rule rather than the exception, the right teams and expertise can bring together knowledge and communication within the right channels.

**Training and development must be approached from multiple perspectives.** There is a need for collaboration and integration of multiple disciplines, from an understanding of food technology, nutrition technology, product development, regulatory and marketing. Combined skillsets and seamless communication have not always been common in food and beverage companies, but there is opportunity for leaders today to build this talent and provide opportunity for growth and development. Don't underestimate the patience in

building this system and maintaining it as it will greatly benefit the success of the organization for years to come.

**Success will require an agile culture adept at external partnership.**

Investing in employees to create cross-disciplinary skills is one approach to merging capabilities, but when the breadth of expertise needed is broad, it can be difficult to know it all. Investing in a venture group focused on third party partnerships is another considerable tactic to consider. Creating these partnerships to bring together critical areas of expertise can lead to great benefits.

Facing the future of personalized nutrition starts with an open dialogue among today's leaders addressing the challenges and opportunities within the industry. Those that bring together the right mix of competencies, communicate effectively and build a complementary culture built on both science and human nature will come out on top.

## Hosts



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## About Egon Zehnder

Egon Zehnder is the world's leadership advisory firm, sharing one goal: to transform people, organizations, and the world through great leadership. We know what great leaders can do and are passionate about delivering the best leadership solutions for our clients. As One Firm, our more than 450 Consultants in 68 offices and 40 countries bring our individual strengths to form one powerful collaborative team. We partner closely with public and private corporations, family-owned enterprises, and nonprofit and government agencies to provide Board advisory services, CEO search and succession, executive search, executive assessment, leadership development, and organizational transformation. We share a commitment to and pride in doing work that contributes to successful careers, stronger companies, and a better world.

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