

Nutritionist 'Judge Judy' finds lobbyists guilty of gluttony

By Jim Snyder

Danger constantly stalks the lobbyist trying to keep trim. It hovers on silver trays in the form of spring rolls, crab cakes and those potato-thingys that look like crab cakes but are not.

It sits, temptingly, in shiny bottles behind open bars. It comes in the convenience of the cafeteria muffin, moist and delicious in its cellophane shell.

Its most renowned incarnation is the very symbol of steaming professional success: the 14-oz. steak.

"Oh, God. It's really horrible!" exclaimed Janet Zalman. As director of the Zalman Nutrition Group, she counsels lobbyists on the dietary hazards of their job.

"You pray you don't have a heart attack that day," she said, thinking of the consequences of eating a thick, fatty T-bone steak. She then punched numbers into her calculator to tabulate the calorie count of a 14-ounce porterhouse steak: around 860. That doesn't even account for a side of mashed potatoes, drinks, or, if you're really pushing it, that fried calamari appetizer.

A native New Yorker, Zalman has fought the crab cakes, the beer and the ever-bigger slabs of beef that have stretched Washington waistlines for the past two decades. Her directness

and wit have inspired one K Street client to quip that she is the "Judge Judy" of diet plans.

In Zalman's case, however, her agitation comes from the size of portions in modern American life.

"Everything is oversized!" she exclaims. "Plates are bigger, spoons are bigger, forks are bigger, therefore portions are bigger."

Bagels that used to be 160 calories now come in at 350. The cream cheese adds another 150 calories.

A small steak used to be four ounces, Zalman says. Now it's at least 10. Said Zalman: "I've eaten at the Capital Grille. Their food is great. It should just be half the size!"

Her standing offer at restaurants is that she will pay 75 percent of the cost for half a meal.

Zalman has given her tough diet talk to the staffs of then-first lady Hillary Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. She has lectured the American Petroleum Institute and AT&T federal affairs division. And she has spoken to the American Institute of Wine and Food about the dangers of both.

Zalman, who for the record looks fit and trim, dispenses wisdom in quippy, quotable lines reminiscent of another daytime guru: Dr. Phil. Zalmanisms include:

"We have to get back to normal," meaning smaller portions.



K Street's
**DIET
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"I'm not for a 'no-carb' diet. But I'm not for a double carb diet, either."

"This is not, 'I hope for a miracle.' This is the non-miracle diet. The one nobody wants to hear about. The one that actually takes some thought and effort."

Zalman counsels all types, from doctors to lawyers to stay-at-home moms. But it is the lobbyist's lifestyle, centered on socializing, that presents particular challenges.

"Essentially, you are bombarded with food," Zalman says.

Passed on the steak at lunch? Good, as Zalman suggests eating red meat just once a week. But don't congratulate yourself as you shovel almonds in your mouth instead.

"Are nuts good for you? Sure, if you eat five or seven. A half a cup of nuts is over 500 calories. At receptions people will be very careful. They won't have any-

thing to drink. But then they start with the nuts!"

Andrew Dodson, a lobbyist at Bockorny Group, admits to being "weak" when it comes to food.

"I have a tough time passing on the hors d'oeuvres," he says. Zalman put him on a crash no-sugar diet, which he struggled with for the first two weeks.

"WE HAVE TO GET BACK TO NORMAL [SMALLER PORTIONS]."

Janet Zalman
Zalman Nutrition Group

But once his body adjusted, he found that his energy levels, which had been erratic, remained high.

Unhealthy eating had raised fellow Bockorny Group lobbyist Melissa

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Schulman's cholesterol to the at-risk range, alarming the 45-year-old. When her doctor prescribed a pill, Schulman went to Zalman for help.

She has lost 30 pounds since seeing Zalman and has a goal of dropping 15 more. The weight loss led one client to ask delicately whether she had been ill.

He needn't have been embarrassed.

"I almost hugged him," said Schulman.

Even better than the weight loss, Schulman's cholesterol is in the normal range.

Zalman's most popular program lasts eight weeks and costs \$985. "It's not inexpensive, but it is the most helpful thing I have ever done for my health," Schulman says.

Zalman's regimen requires clients to keep a food diary, which she reviews once a week. Dieters log what they've eaten as well as their craving levels throughout the course of the day, based on a scale of 1 to 10.

Zalman also keeps in her office a merciless metal scale that clients step on during every visit.

Sandi Stuart, a lobbyist at Clark & Weststock, said the scale focused her mind and helped her resist the dietary temptations of her job, while the diary helped to increase her awareness of the alternatives to unhealthy food. "It's about learning what are the best choices to make."

Stuart has lost 15 pounds since September, for which she also credits a trainer. Sugar was one of her major problems.

"I'm a Southern girl," she says. "You grow up with it. It's there."

If portion size is public enemy number

one in the battle of the bulge, sugar is a close number two. Zalman counsels clients to limit sugar intake to four grams per item.

Because the body turns excess carbohydrates into sugar, she also restricts dieters to two slices of bread a meal, which she describes as one unit.

"If you go out and get a 12-inch sub or a giant focaccia sandwich, it's not two slices," she says, holding her fingers farther apart than most mouths are wide. "It's two units!"

Zalman says clients already know about the dangers of trans fat, carbohydrates and red meat when they walk through her door. What they need is structure and someone to hold them accountable.

"What you have to do is to make a specific plan and then be willing to do it," she says.

If she thinks a prospective client isn't serious about healthy eating, she won't take them on: "I have clear rules of the road."

Kelly Bingel, a lobbyist at Mehlman Vogel Castagnetti, lost 10 pounds with Zalman's help. She doesn't visit Zalman anymore, but in moments of crisis she still hears her voice, which carries a distinctive Brooklyn accent.

"I was at a Mexican restaurant the other day and I was about to order a margarita. And I heard her voice in my head: 'Why would you order a margarita?! Do you know how much sugar is in that?'"

Zalman preaches the benefits of a Mediterranean diet, composed of small portions of fish, chicken and lean meat, with plenty of fruits and vegetables.

"We have to come to terms with the fact that our eating culture is totally out of alignment with a healthy lifestyle," she says.



BENJAMIN J. MYERS

Nutritionist Janet Zalman is personally offended by the size of portions served at restaurants. "I don't want anything that big on my plate."