

Chris's Corner: See the Forest

If you run a business, I am sure you are all in and giving the best you can day in and day out. Even when you get time off, I am sure your operation is not far from your thoughts, but at the same time you need to take a little break.

Why not take your down time as a chance to not only enjoy yourself, but maybe do a little research?

Human nature would tell us if you're in the restaurant business or whatever business, you don't want to think about it or be near it when you get a break. Have you ever considered taking off your operators hat and become a customer for a while?

A gentleman I know runs when of the best restaurants around. When he gets time off, or perhaps he dedicates this time, he goes and visits his competitors. This isn't sneaky, its totally above board. He doesn't visit in some disguise; he openly goes to restaurants in his market area. He will sit at the bar and have a drink. Perhaps he will peruse the menu and sample some appetizers. Maybe he and his wife will get a table and have a full course meal.

He puts himself in his customer's shoes and he has a full customer experience in restaurants all around his area. In fact, he is so regular, he is considered a good customer although technically he could be considered a competitor.

He treats the staff graciously and is always complimentary about his positive experiences. Many restaurant owners, know him, like him and will sit down and shoot the breeze with him. They will talk shop.

I am sure he makes mental notes of the all new, positive and creative ideas he soaks up through his experiences. If he is at the bar, he will engage with the clientele and genuinely pick their brains.

In running your own operation, you don't have to reinvent the wheel all by yourself and think in a vacuum how to improve and grow your business; the world can be your laboratory and you don't necessarily have to focus on your own market niche. Lot's of great ideas can be borrowed operationally from businesses not directly to yours.

Economic growth and the growth of industries is a history of "borrowing" and improving upon the ideas and operational methods of those who came before you and, just as important, your contemporaries.

If you aren't as outgoing and comfortable as my friend frequenting his competitors, then when you go on vacation or take a trip out of town, visit businesses like yours. In this case, you're not

a competitor at all and I am sure if time permits you could speak to management and pick their brains. A business owner likes nothing more than sharing their success to an interested audience.

Don't just stare at the trees of your business; get out into the forest and make research recreational.