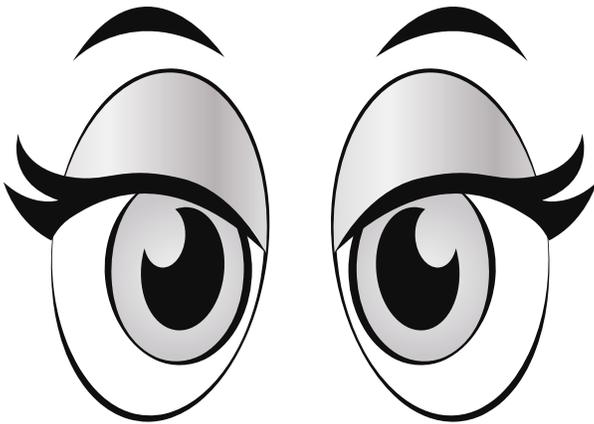


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The Best of *As I See It*



Part Two



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On the Cover

Volume 78, Number 4, 2019

The response to the last issue was very positive, so we're continuing the theme. Each week, an MMBA electronic newsletter is sent to industry members across the globe. If you would like to subscribe (free), go to the MMBA website at www.municipalbev.com.

Each issue contains a column written by an MMBA director. The subject matter is at the sole discretion of the writer. Some of the best articles are reprinted in this issue starting on page 6.

Cover art designed by Freepik.



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MMBA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Summer has been here and gone and soon it will be December 31st. Where did 2019 go? For most of us, this is our busiest time of the year.

As I'm sitting here writing this article I just received a text message from one of my sales reps. This rep was supposed to show up tonight to do a wine class for about 30 people. Her text message says, "I'm not feeling well. I have the flu. I'm sorry but I can't make it. I will reschedule in January or February."

You can imagine what I will be doing after I get this article written. Yes, downloading information on the Internet so I can do a wine class. The joys of running a liquor operation!

We wear many hats as managers. We are sales clerks, stock people, maintenance technicians, multimedia specialists and wine class presenters — all to keep our customers happy.

We have wine class/tasting here in Bagley about once a month. But a few months ago we started having sweet wine classes as well. With the sweet classes I'm trying to focus on the younger generation, and not just the millennials but the Z generation as well. This generation's drinking habits is very different from any other we've dealt with in the past.

Some of you may have noticed your wine sales are declining a bit and you are probably wondering why. Well, seltzers have moved into our industry in full force and unfortunately they're not going anywhere anytime soon. They are taking sales away from wine and beer.

The Z generation is looking for low ABV (alcohol by volume), high flavored drinks. They are not loyal to just one brand and like jumping around and trying every new thing. This is why there's going to be about 30 to 40 new products in this crazy flavor profile added to our market next year.

I'm actually in the process of setting up a new sub department in my beers so I can track this phenomenon. I was recently at a National Alcohol Beverage Control Association conference where I attended a presentation on trends. They had a lot of interesting information about the Z generation and low AB drinks. Here is a link I think is useful to us in our industry: Snap.pro/nabca.

Back to my wine class, we ended up tasting 6 Thanksgiving wines, 3 whites and 3 reds. I gave a handout with information about each of the wines and what they paired well with, just in case I forgot to talk about it in my presentation.

We ended up with 36 people who wanted to learn, so it was a good group. I received many compliments on my presentation and was told they had a great time. So I must have done a good job baffling them with BS and killing them with kindness!

But the true test to how well I did was that my wine sales were up over 5.5 times a normal day! I hope everyone has a great December and try not to wear too many hats.

Happy Holidays and take care!

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THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT



BEING THE LEADER YOUR STAFF WANTS

By Maggie Olson,
Hinckley/soon to be Pine City

*Leadership is not about being the best.
Leadership is about making everyone else better*

– Unknown

We often discuss the challenges of retail management. I believe my greatest challenge is finding good and reliable help. I guarantee I am not alone.

When you think about your current staff, do you believe they are engaged in their work? According to a recent Gallup poll, only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged at work. Why is this number so low?

A lot of experts believe job satisfaction is closely related to leadership within the business. Some of us are combination stores. Some of us have two separate buildings. Some of us sell a limited selection of off sale behind the bar. Some of us have no idea what it's like to have a bar. Some of us have to work with collective bargaining units. Some of us work nights/weekends/doubles/holidays.

There's no perfect formula for staffing that will work for all of our businesses. So we do the best we can. But staffing is hard. I think I can make it easier for you though.

Ask yourself — are you the type of boss you'd want to work for? Are you doing all you can to train and assist your staff? Do you speak with respect? Do you get your hands dirty too?

This is my final *As I See It*, as I have accepted a new position outside of Municipal liquor. I will be working for the City of Pine City as their Deputy Clerk. I have enjoyed being in this association and a Director for the MMBA. I hope I continue the relationships I have made with you all.

Before I depart from this role, I would like to leave you with my tips for being the leader your staff wants in order to keep them engaged:

1. Treat everyone with respect. Even on the days it's hard. ESPECIALLY on the days it's hard.
2. Listen to listen, don't listen to respond. I solve so many problems simply by hearing people out. Sometimes, we just want to be heard.
3. Encourage creativity and independence. This will make your job so much easier. Delegate, delegate, delegate, and eventually you won't have to delegate it anymore.

4. Empower your staff. Teach them tasks that give them greater responsibility and lighten your load at the same time.
5. Praise. And then praise some more. Before you leave for the day, say thank you to each staff member.
6. Work alongside them. Help with the truck. Ring on a register. Bartend an event. Work a weekend day. Be a good teammate.

You don't build a business. You build people, and people build the business.

– Zig Ziglar



THE FINAL PUSH

By Nancy Drumsta,
Delano

Well, here we are entering into the final quarter of the year. It becomes a final push to increase store revenue and show your city the role and value Municipal Liquor brings into your community. Many of us have been around the block for a few years and can foresee what these last few months of the year bring to the table.

We have to gear up for stocking the store for the holiday season and also keep that balance to watch our inventory level within a reasonable amount. If you preform cycle counts to track inventory you are able to take advantage of some great end-of-year pricing on deals and steals.

If you still do a full store inventory on January 1, not so much. It baffles me when I speak with managers who still do that first day of the year inventory, usually mandated by the city administration. Doing the inventory throughout the year increases the accuracy of your numbers in the end.

Most of the problems we encounter are data entry issues and can be corrected by doing the research to determine why any particular item is off when you count it. My staff is currently doing a large amount of physical counts as we are in that "in-between" time before the holiday season.

This is such a great time to focus on these types of tasks as our customers have survived the upset of the Twins losing and their focus on the Vikings all takes place between 11am and Noon on Sunday.

If you are still doing the first-of-the-year counts and would like any further information about how to keep up on inventory counting throughout the year, please do not hesitate to reach out to myself or one of the other directors. We are always happy to help out in any way we can.

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THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT



ARE YOU READY? By Karissa Kurth Buffalo Lake

As we enter into the busy holiday season next week, are your facilities ready?

I know this time of year gets hectic. Between work and home, sometimes things get overlooked in our businesses.

Here are some items to check out to make sure you are ready to handle the extra holiday traffic:

- Have you communicated with your staff about creating a great shopping experience for your customers and the expectations you have?
- Is your backroom/cooler organized so it is easy for staff to find items quickly and refill shelves for customers?
- Are your shelves dusty or are there bottles with a layer of dust on them?
- Have you created a cheat sheet for your staff to sell wine that includes names of specific wine on your shelf that pairs well with certain foods?
- Does every product have a price tag on your shelves?
- Are your cooler doors clean?
- Do your floors need to be mopped or vacuumed? What about your rugs?
- Are your bathrooms clean?
- Do you have signs hanging up telling customers about upcoming events or special promotions that are going on?
- Is the outside of your building/parking lot eye appealing? Is there garbage, weeds, cigarette butts, etc. that need to be picked up?
- Do you have items that are not moving and you need to get rid of? Create a Clearance section or run an On Sale special in your bar to move those items.

Wishing all of you a successful Holiday Season!!

Cheers!



QUESTIONS WE SHOULD ALL BE ASKING By John Jacobi Isanti Liquor

As we enter the next two major holidays, are we ready for business? Just a continuation of Karissa's checklist of items from last week's column.

Now that Thanksgiving has come and gone, I hope some of these items may spark your imagination to help get you ready for the holidays.

If you went to any of the regional meetings, we talked about having a "holiday wine list" for our employees. This list will help our staff get the customers what they need based on what they are serving for the holidays.

Questions we all should be asking:

- How many proprietary brands have I decided to carry?
- How much of an impact will I have on the competition in my area?
- How much impact will I have on customer service? Better yet are my employees ready and willing to give great customer service?"
- Are our employees making an impact on business? Or, are they leaving money on the table and not selling enough products to help satisfy the customer's needs?
- Do I have policies and procedures set forth for successful holiday sales?
- Does my store show community value? Do our customers understand what we stand for as a municipal liquor operation and do our customers see what value my store has to the community?
- Do I sample the products I want to promote for the holidays?
- Am I fully staffed to handle the additional business I will have during these busy times?

Yes, many questions. But do you have answers to all of these questions or solutions to help make business better and profitable?

Continued on following page. . .

THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT

This is one reason why I enjoy attending these regional meetings or conferences the MMBA offers every year. This is my time for education not only to educate my fellow managers, but to educate my staff to help us improve our business. Our success has everything to do with what we do as managers and assistant managers.

I relayed the great success I am having with proprietary brands in my store at the regional meetings and it appears many of you have decided to bring these in.

You can't ignore the competition no matter where you are in Minnesota. You can and will have an impact!

These proprietary brands are great products! I get positive feedback from my customers who have tried them and they become repeat buyers. The biggest challenge I face is having enough supply on hand as many of them sell so fast, it can take up to six weeks to replenish them.

Oh yeah "planning and patience," you need that too!



DON'T IGNORE THE ISSUE

**By Ross Olson
Sauk Rapids**

I'm the city administrator for a medium sized community. I also wear the hat of Human Resources Director. Over that past 19 years I have hired some amazing staff. People who come to work with a positive attitude.

An attitude that becomes infectious to the other employees and creates an environment of productivity and pride. Even with an amazing pool of employees, every workplace will have people who falter sometimes. For the most part, this is normal.

As leaders it is our job to assist this employee by recognizing the issue and creating a path for correction. Our best asset is our staff and we owe it to them, the City and to the other staff members to ensure all are working to their potential. Correction by coaching starts with a discussion.

Making sure the employee feels valued and your comments pertaining to the issue are received as an opportunity to resolve the issue and move forward as a productive workplace.

While attending the Annual Conference in Alexandria this spring, I was approached by a number of MMBA members who were struggling with difficult staff.

Employees who were making their ability to manage impossible and becoming a workplace enjoyment and productivity hindrance. Employees who have been allowed to act in a manner that no longer can be ignored, but management struggles to know where to start. This situation needs action and should start with that conversation.

If the conversation doesn't correct the issue, a process of documented progressive discipline needs to happen. Progressive discipline is not intended to be a road to termination. Documented discipline are opportunities for understanding what the City sees as appropriate workplace behavior and a path to correction.

The key is we don't ignore the issue.

The City Administrator/Clerk, City Attorney and the League of Minnesota Cities are resources you should use in situations when progressive discipline are needed. In the event the goal of correction can't be achieved, appropriate documentation is crucial if the only solution is separation.

The City of Sauk Rapids uses a process that includes a Directional Memo, Documented Oral Reprimand, Written Reprimand and finally, Written Reprimand that includes recommendation for termination.

All of these document templates can be found in the City's Personnel Policy on the City of Sauk Rapids website or you can contact me directly for the documents.

You can also contact me if you just want to talk about the issue. I am always happy to listen and help.

Thank you for all your help getting us where we are today!

-Tito

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THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT



WE'RE HERE TO HELP MEMBERS

By Joe Kessler,
Spring Grove

I started at The Corner, Spring Grove's municipal combo off and on-sale, three years ago this past June. I was managing another local bar and restaurant before I came to the "city."

When I first took over, it was a pretty interesting learning curve for me to learn how to deal with the council and different ways of doing things since we're city owned and running an off-sale which I had no experience doing.

Full disclosure, I was a liquor store clerk for the City of Walker, MN for a couple years, but I had no operational knowledge.

I was constantly second guessing myself when I took over The Corner in regards to my role in the city, if my markups were competitive with other stores close to mine, if I was too cheap with my bar prices and if I actually knew the market like I thought I did.

After awhile, I learned of the MMBA and what we/they were. I learned MMBA was there for me. The MMBA is there to help managers, city clerks, city administrators, city councils, etc.

The MMBA is a group of like minded individuals from all over the state from big cities to small rural communities, like I am in Spring Grove. The association is there to help all members.

MMBA promotes joint purchasing, which if you don't take advantage of you're missing out! This concept really helps the bottom line even for a little store like mine.

I'm not able most of the time to take advantage of case deals from vendors. They're too big for my store and joint purchasing really helps.

If you don't participate in the regional meetings you should, same goes for the annual meeting in Alexandria. I went to my first regional meeting three years ago this month. I was skeptical I would actually learn anything.

I did and I also made new contacts with other managers and a rep from Southern Wine and Spirits. I have had to use that contact more than once.

After that first exposure to an MMBA meeting, I was hooked and haven't missed a meeting since. I also attended my first annual conference this past year. That again was worth it.

I met managers from all over the state and also made important contacts with numerous industry reps who have helped when I'm not getting what I need from my sales people.

I've also had conversations throughout the year with managers who operate stores about the same size as mine as to how they do things and others have contacted me on how I do things. I wouldn't have contact with these managers without the MMBA meetings.

All in all, if you're not a participating member, going to meetings, reaching out to board members such as myself when you have questions or concerns, you should be.

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THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT



HEY, I FOUND THE BLANTON'S, BUFFALO TRACE AND OLD WELLER!

By Mike Larson,
St. Anthony Village

That's right folks, it's out there and available to purchase. The problem is that it's all in Louisville, Kentucky!

I just returned from Louisville (pronounced LooaVul) where I attended the Beverage Alcohol Retailers Conference hosted by Beverage Dynamics magazine. I attended the conference with our Executive Director Paul Kaspszak, and Brooklyn Center Operation Manager Tom Agnes.

The conference was fantastic! The educational seminars were informative and engaging. MMBA conference speaker Tom Shay presented his "Competing Against Big Box Retailers" seminar. Minnesota's own Mike Max presented "Five Reasons People Succeed."

Our Executive Director Paul Kaspszak sat on a panel called "Exclusive Products: Private Labels and Single Barrel Programs." Paul's topic was proprietary labels and the opportunities they provide us to compete and make money.

Mike and Tom did a fantastic job! Paul was outstanding representing Minnesota and our association!

Seminars presented included *Gathering and Utilizing Data*, *Capitalizing on the Bourbon Culture*, *Top Wine Misconceptions*, Three-Tier Industry Panel Discussion, a Retailer Panel Discussion, *Leading the Workforce of the Future*, and many more.

All seminars and educational opportunities were worth their weight in gold. Equally important to the seminars is the networking that happens at conferences.

Discussions with other retailers and visits to Bourbon Row in Louisville (pronounced LuhVul) was attention grabbing to say the least.

Highlights for me were:

1. There is plenty of Old Weller, Blanton's and Buffalo Trace in Kentucky and maybe rightly so. After all, their economy and visitor attractions depend on Bourbon production, marketing and sales. We sell Bourbon here, too. The lack of inventory in Minnesota is an obstacle for our association.

2. The delivery/supply chain is horrible across the country. This topic was discussed consistently at panel seminars and during networking events. Low unemployment numbers are having an effect on every industry across the nation, including ours. This problem is an obstacle for our association.

3. Proprietary labels continue to make an impact on big box retailers where allowed by law. This topic was discussed with everyone I came in contact with. Their availability in our stores provides additional income due to higher profit percentages and assists us with competing in our market! The main obstacle regarding proprietary brands is the supply/delivery issues that retailers are experiencing across the country. This is becoming a huge obstacle for our association.

4. The disconnect retailers discussed between the suppliers, distributors and retailers. Chris Brown, VP, Director of Sales & Marketing Integration and Execution for Brown Foreman presented the importance of the three-tier system of supplier, distributor and retailer. Simply put, our industry MUST maintain this law! What was most interesting though was Mr. Brown's understanding of a good working relationship between the three groups. His point was that we all benefit from good relationship.

A retailer in attendance promptly pointed out in no uncertain terms that the relationships are not good in many cases. Frustration with deal/promotion structures, delivery systems, beneficial sales calls (if existent), and overall trust and support from distributors as well as suppliers across the nation. This topic received a round of applause and is an obstacle in our state also.

5. The proliferation of product sales at distillery locations in Louisville (pronounced LUHVul). Specialty, rare and limited Bourbons, in bottles of ALL sizes and gift packages were available for public purchase at the distilleries. Visitors can bottle, customize their own labels and purchase it right at the distillery. What an experience right?

And availability of Old Weller, Blanton's, Buffalo Trace, etc., not a problem! Or is it? Who could blame OUR customers for wanting that experience and availability of limited products while visiting a distillery and making their purchase? I see this as an obstacle for our association.

I could go to the end of the internet with my experience in Louisville (pronounced LOOEYville).

THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT

I witnessed that across the nation, alcohol beverage retailers are a tight family. The Minnesota market is being closely monitored by retailers across the country, proprietary brands and Sunday sales in particular.

So where do we go from here? Do we get stuck in the quicksand and slowly get sucked down by the obstacles we are experiencing or do we collaborate, improve or eliminate these obstacles?

Mike Max said, "Every adversity creates opportunity" and by experience, I couldn't agree more. Tom Shay offers many ways to compete against big box retailers by capitalizing our strengths and developing relationships with customers and vendors. Tom's recommendations work!

I believe MMBA members utilize their advice and create opportunities for resolution to our obstacles through our strengths and relationships. Our association will continue to lead and provide success for our members and our family of retailers across the nation!

The conference concluded with the award ceremony for the 2019 Top 100 Retailers. Brooklyn Center received this year's award. Previous winners were Lakeville, Hutchinson and Windom.

Congratulations to all, past and present, for a well-deserved award! St. Anthony Village Wine & Spirits was also a recipient of this year's award.

I am honored to accept the award on behalf of the City of St. Anthony Village, the Mayor and Council, City Administration and staff, especially my team at the stores! This award is recognition for your outstanding commitment to public service for our residents and a job well done by all involved! I also consider it a privilege to represent the MMBA by accepting the award.

After all, this entire association is deserving of recognition for their value to our communities! Now get to work trying to figure out the correct pronunciation of Louisville!!!



SHIFT WORK, HARD WORK By Bill Ludwig Paynesville

One of my favorite songs is "Shift Work" by Kenney Chesney and George Strait. The song talks about the struggles and issues of shift workers. Some of the lyrics came to light on a recent road trip.

Last week 2 of my friends and I made a quick road trip to Ely to see our friends before they move. They recently sold their home and are moving to the Bahamas. Nice right?! On our way up, our first stop was for fuel.

While paying I asked the grumpy looking cashier "How's it going today? He grumbled "Just another crappy day at work!" I replied "Maybe customer service isn't the best place for you."

At our lunch stop at KFC, my friends' orders were taken very quickly. As I made my way to the counter, the cashier walked away like she didn't even see me (I didn't even have camo on, it was a bright orange shirt).

I watched her fill drive through orders for approximately 10 minutes. Finally she noticed me and asked "Do you want something?" I paused and chose my words carefully, "Do you sell chicken? Here's your sign!!"

Our last stop was at a liquor store (not city owned). My friend and I shopped for several minutes and were never greeted. Even the employee who walked next to us with a cart of beer ignored us. When I got to the checkout counter, the cashier without making eye contact or smiling asked "Is that it." I couldn't resist any longer.

With a big ole smile I slapped the counter and said "How are you doing today!!" He looked at me like I was crazy, then he started laughing. I pointed at his smile and said "That's what customers want to see!"

After I left he asked my friend "What's with that guy?" (No comments please!). He told him "He's been helping customers his whole life, I'd probably listen to his advice."

I was starting to think it was me who was crabby. I know our shifts and days can get long and tedious. Summer is crazy at work for all of us managers and shift workers.

Let's have a visit with our cashiers and remind them how important a friendly "Hello" and a smiling "Thanks for stopping" is for our business. Remind them how important first impressions are.

We're in the liquor business let's have fun! Hopefully we all get to take a road trip this summer to have time with family and friends. It's always refreshing to be on the other side of the counter once in a while!

Safe travels!

BREWED THE HARD WAY



THIS BUD'S FOR YOU

MMBA COMMERCIAL MEMBERS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU! CONTACT THEM!

Silver Plus

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THE BEST OF AS I SEE IT



PLEASE PUT THE PLUG BACK IN THE LAKE

By Sarah Olsen
Mapleton

The kind of humor I like is the thing that makes me laugh for five seconds and think for ten minutes.

I would like to remind us all to take a few moments for a stress reliever. The following are complaints Minnesota residents have made to their city clerk:

- A resident asked what the city was going to do about her neighbor's Creeping Charlie . . . it's spreading into her yard!
- A resident called and wanted the city to do something about the cottonwood tree fluff all over their deck.
- A citizen was livid because stray cats were getting inside his trailer house.
- A guy came in and complained we let our lake levels get too high.
- "We couldn't have used that much water, I was gone for two weeks out of the quarter. My teen daughter was the only one home at that time."
- "Is the city going to observe Halloween since it falls on a Sunday?"
- A resident asked if someone would put the plug back in the lake because the lake was getting low.
- "How come you are only open during regular business hours?"
- "Can you send one of the guys out to fix my TV antenna in the next half hour? Oprah is on at 4:00."
- "We could not have used this much water! My husband and I shower together so that we do not use so much water."
- A woman called wondering how long and at what temperature she should prepare her Thanksgiving turkey.
- Received a call from a resident who had a flat tire and wanted to know what they should do.

- A resident wanted to know what the city was going to do about the birds that drop their do-do on her picnic table.
- "You know, I have to go to the bathroom and wash my hands, so I suppose that is why my water bill is so high."
- A gentleman called and said he had a brick and he wondered if I knew how old it was.
- We had a lady call in and say her neighbors' dog poops in the same spot in her yard every day and she steps in it every day. Is there something we can do?
- A guy who said he builds rustic furniture called and asked if I'd scoot down to the beach and pick up what drift wood was there. He'd stop by on his way through town later in the afternoon to pick it up.
- A citizen asked if I could come and get the little men out of his heating system; they were making too much noise and bothering him.
- A resident called and said something was wrong with the city's water heater because she had no hot water!

Be nice to your city clerk — he or she deals with crazies too!

Have a Happy and Safe Holiday Season!

We've got you covered.

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CAN YOU SAY AWKWARD?

By Brenda Visnovec
Lakeville

One of the questions brought up by Tom Shay at this year's annual conference was "Are you checking out your competition?"

Sounds obvious to me, but during my many visits to stores across the state, this is also one of the first questions I ask a store manager. Unfortunately, the most common response is a proud and defiant "NO!"

The question is not implying we suspect of you of secretly making purchases from your competition. It is asking if you are checking out the competition to see how you compare to them. How can you improve without knowing how high the bar is set?

Want to know something else? Your competition is checking up on you!

By now I'm sure you've all heard, a rather large and intrusive retailer opened shop in the metro area a couple of years ago.

Just last week, our store manager was working the sales floor when she observed a customer walking the aisles talking on his cell phone. She approached and asked him if he needed assistance. He declines and continues perusing the aisles.

She remained close, and heard him quoting prices over the phone. She again approached him and asked if he needed assistance. He again declined her offer.

She pushed a bit more when she continued hearing him quoting prices over the phone. He stuttered a bit and then informed her he is in conducting a survey. She asked what company he was with.

He turned around, frustrated by her persistency, and informed her he was with the large competitor up the road. He looked at her sheepishly as if he was anticipating to be booted out of the store. But instead, she turns up the volume on her pleasantries meter and welcomed him.

She told him if there was anything he was unable to locate, or if he had any further questions, to please be certain to ask.

She was still in earshot when she heard the voice on the other end of the phone ask the individual in the store, "Did I really just hear her welcome you and offer her assistance to you?" Yes, he had heard it correctly!

In fact, she informed staff if the gentlemen ended up purchasing product, no matter what it was, she wanted them to ensure it was carried out of the store for him. He ended up purchasing a six pack of craft beer and our staff carried the product out to the car for him.

Can you say awkward?

Not for us, but for him. He had to return to his store and superior to inform them the competition just welcomed him and provided the best customer service experience possible.

Bottom line, the competition is watching you and as store managers we need to get out and ensure we are watching others.

Items to observe include:

- Are their stores cleaner than yours? Compare entry ways, register stations and even the restrooms.
- Do they offer better selection? Check out their product selection, their tastings and other offerings.
- Are they beating you on customer service? That is easy to compare within the first thirty seconds of entering a store.
- Are you being approached quickly and cheerfully?
- Are they knowledgeable?
- Did they fully satisfy your questions?
- Lastly, did they offer carry out?

Taking a half-hour of your time to check out the competition is one of the wisest investments you can make for your operation.

Make the time to do so!



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