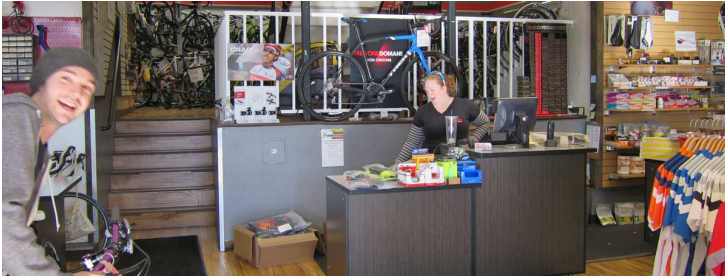


Is it always awesome, every day, owning a bike shop?



MikeF, RC Service Manager, doing an awesome job photo-bombing my attempt to capture a day in the life of a bike shop.

A few weeks ago, a former employee from the way-back days had a curious Facebook post. It was celebrating his first day not owning a bike shop in quite some time. Everyone was congratulating him, and subsequent posts were from friends and close relatives telling him how he never looked better, he was relaxed, he was smiling, the best years of his life were ahead of him.

And I'm thinking, how do I respond to something like that? So I didn't, not for a while. But I couldn't stop considering what this post was saying about people like me, 35 years owning this business with my brother Steve, 41+ years in business total. Those Facebook posts made owning a bike shop sound like imprisonment with cruel & unusual punishment! Obviously, I couldn't stay silent. Not my style. And just as obviously, there would be a relevant quote from Star Trek, one that reflected my attitude towards work and life in general, an extension of Socrates' quote "The unexamined life is not worth living."-

"You know that pain and guilt can't be taken away with a wave of a magic wand. They're the things we carry with us, the things that make us who we are. If we lose them, we lose ourselves. I don't want my pain taken away! I need my pain!" Captain Kirk (of course!)

For my friend, there was a massive lifting of something not-so-fun from his shoulders, something that was apparently keeping him from things that he wanted to do (or at least things that others wanted to do with him). And if I focused only on the problems that come with owning a business, I might feel the same way. But it's the "pain" of retail that drives me.

It's not the problems that matter. It's the solutions you come up with. That's what we're here for. The struggle with various issues allows us to get creative, to work harder, maybe physically, maybe mentally, and do something for somebody that they couldn't do themselves. Our ability to do it better than someone else is what defines our success in business.

And to me, that's not something to dread, it's something to be happy about, to celebrate. It's not about going into work dreading all the BSOs that come in the door (BSO=Bike Shaped Object, a derisive industry term for bikes that were either built to be cheap, not to survive, or have been ridden into the ground). Rather, it's helping people out who already thought we're the place to come for solutions (why else would they be here?), and figure out how to work some magic. That shouldn't wear you down, it should build you up.

But it's not just what we do for our bikes and our customers, but skills we teach our employees as well, because the processes and patience they learn should help them wherever they go, whatever they do. I hope that someday down the road they might think not just about the good times at an early job, but also what they learned; things that have less to do specifically with bikes than they do with helping people.

I'll admit there are those days that do wear you down, and if too many of them get strung together, you can start thinking that's how it's going to go on and on. Forever. You've got to shake yourself out of that funk and start over, looking forward to that next bike or customer, no matter what, and decide it's going to be an awesome experience for all. And if that next bike is either a BSO or worse (possibly a Frankenbike, a collection of parts that don't work together), at least you'll have a good laugh about it afterward.

I'm 58, 59 in a couple of weeks. As long as I still see the magic in riding a bike, I'm still going to see the magic in putting and

keeping others on a bike. And if I have to leave this business at anything but the top of my game, if I'm leaving because I feel like I'm worn out and have nothing left to give, it won't feel like a celebration to me.

Mike Jacoubowsky, Chain Reaction Bicycles since Feb 1st, 1980.