

Don't Go To College; Let College Come to You

Every now and then I get a chance to meet a kindred spirit in an unlikely place.

Today I met one while I was getting a haircut.

"Trish" is an older African-American woman with a quick sense of humor, an excellent skill in haircutting, and a knack for great salon chair conversations. Somehow we came to the topic of writing, and we talked about how my habit helps me to notice more and be more curious. I remarked that her own job must bring her plenty of opportunities for the same awareness.

If you're working in a service industry job, you have a golden opportunity which most people working in more corporate office jobs rarely get. You have to interact on a daily basis with a staggering variety of human beings, all with their own stories, habits, skills, and perspectives.

Especially if you cut their hair often, you have to know them well enough to provide quality customer service and at least a basic level of chit-chat.

There are two ways you can feel about that.

Interacting with this many people can be exhausting and trying, just another obstacle as you trudge through your job. Many employees take this attitude, and you can see it in their level of customer service. To these employees, customers bring no opportunities in and of themselves. They're only necessary evils so that the management and owners can get paid.

Or, like "Trish," you can view dealing with people as an opportunity to learn. She agreed with me, by the way. Through her conversations with clients, she remarked, she's decided to "let college come to her." And I guarantee that, like me, almost everyone she "interviews" enjoys it.

I don't know if "Trish" ever went to college, but even if she didn't, she has the curiosity and the opportunity to learn more than the average 21 year-old ever bothers to get from time at a university.

After all, "salons" first emerged as gathering places for ideas. Why shouldn't barbershops and hair salons be the same?

If you have the opportunity to work in a service industry, don't just treat customers as cash cows. Treat them as knowledge cows also. (JK, treat them like people, but you get my

point.)