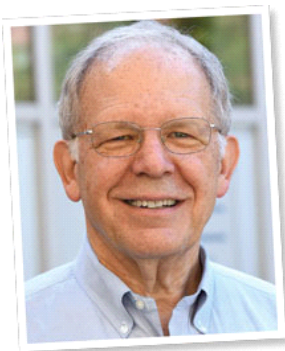


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When Less Is More

Bill McCurry



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The rogue stock trader Ivan Boesky told the 1986 graduating class at UC Berkeley's School of Business that "Greed is all right...". In the 1987 movie "Wall Street," Boesky avatar Gordon Gekko proclaimed, "Greed is good!" Almost 40 years later, many garden centers have found instead that, "Less can be more."

Boesky would have us believe more hours open would mean more money. Recent changes have proven that hypothesis not only questionable, but wrong. The related article on page 26 describes what some retailers have done.

Work/life balances, intensified by COVID, caused people to reduce store hours in order to shift their priorities, reduce their stress and improve the quality of life for themselves and their teams. Every retailer interviewed said reduced hours put them economically and physically ahead of the game. Everyone, including those remaining anonymous, said they had no current intention of going back to longer hours.

John Merrill, director of retail for B.B. Barns, located south of Asheville, North Carolina, reported, "We're closed on Sunday so the team can be ready for the week ahead. We extended Fridays and Saturdays by two additional hours, allowing customers more opportunity to shop."

No retail company is as visible for "limited hours" as Chick-fil-A, known for closing on Sundays to allow employees "rest or worship" as they see fit. It's reported that in six days Chick-fil-A more than doubles the volume competitors do in seven days. Some analysts talk about "food freshness" and "delivery speed." While other fast food chains are expanding their chicken offerings, Chick-fil-A's market share grows despite the new competition. Off the record conversations with Chick-fil-A store operators reveal that the critical reasons for their success are core values and focus on team members. "Closed Sunday" illustrate this. A South Carolina Chick-fil-A operator told us, "We're in the people business, caring for our customers with a team that knows their health and happiness are important to the company. Six-day weeks attract top talent from seven-day-weeks companies. Closing Sundays is consistent with how important the team is to the success of the chain."

In addition to psychological health improvements, a five or six-day open schedule allows for a different caliber of employee. Many said something similar to this: People who like retail, but also need a two-day break, can work with us knowing they'll have consecutive days off. It dramatically alleviates their tension.

Additionally, the five-day week allows the stores to always have their A-Team on duty in all departments.

I've heard this refrain from former retailers who sold or closed their businesses: "You don't know what stress is until you don't have it." Meanwhile, retailers call or email with concerns. They or their team are reaching—or have reached—burnout. Inquiring of those who reduced their open hours/days, all agreed they feel more relaxed, less tense, more open to new ideas and are generally enjoying life more. They aren't kicking back or coasting in this challenging retail environment. They're approaching their frustrations with renewed vigor and enthusiasm, rather than negative feelings of potential defeat. They're watching their sales data.

One last word: Some retailers who close seasonally mentioned their employees often collected unemployment while taking a vacation. While this column doesn't give legal advice, employers/employees saying this could attract attention from a government trying to uncover "waste, fraud and abuse." In many states, unemployment has federal subsidies and requires the "unemployed" to search for work. It's never wise to flaunt the spirit of the law.

Times change. Every business must find out what is healthiest and most profitable for their unique situation. We'd like to hear what has worked for you and your team. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.