

Awesome. So th thanks again for coming on today. Brian, I really appreciate you taking up some time of your busy day. Uh, for people who have not met you yet, tell us a little bit about who you are and, uh, the center you're working with. Yeah. Awesome. Thanks for having me for I appreciate it. Um, currently I'm with, uh, Buffalo Lanes and I say currently, which is kind of funny because I've been with them.

This will be my 25th year. So, um, when I started with Buffalo Lanes, I guess I was in high school, uh, wow. 16. Going on 17. I had been doing some, uh, side work with my dad in construction, but my mom said, you need to get a job that you could do while you're in school. Okay. So, and, um, bowling wasn't the answer because I love bowling.

I had actually never touched a bowling ball before. I remember when I was little, we grew up in Los Angeles. My mom bowled at the Gable house. Um, but I never bowled. I remember playing the pinball machines. I remember, um, you know, being in the daycare with some of the other kids while the other moms were bowling, but it was really just kind of a chance happening.

My mom, Her, um, she worked with someone, her husband was the general manager at Buffalo Lane's Carey, and they were just getting ready to open, um, really, uh, December of 98. Mm-hmm. . And she said, why, why don't you go in? Um, it's really close to where you're going to school. Um, you know, it's, it's simple, you know, you're talking to people and I was actually really shy at the time, so I think my mom was pushing me to do something that maybe would, you know, open me up a little bit.

Right. And, um, yeah, I got the job as essentially a front desk help and hosting kids' birthday parties and then it, um, it just kind of exploded from there. Yeah. And now here, here you are, you said 25 years later. Right. Who would ever first ever thought that the first job was gonna be probably the last job.

Right? . And so you said you started at the front counter and now you're the, uh, the GM at, uh, Buffalo. So, yeah, I was working the front desk. I remember, um, our general manager at the time, I think was, um, a little overwhelmed with, um, how many parties we were having booked on the weekends. So he had, he had basically two girls hired to, uh, to host parties.

And it was not even close to enough. So I remember him asking me, he said, Hey, would you, um, would you like to work with Lisa for a little bit and she'll show you how to do birthday parties? And I said, mm-hmm. . Um, sure. You, you know, I mean, why not? So, um, and then weekend and, you know, we basically went three, four weekends in.

And I remember, um, I asked him, I said, um, are you looking for someone to do parties? And he said, well, you're doing such a good job. Why don't you just continue hosting the parties on the weekends? So, So we did it, you know, so I did the front desk, I did the birthday parties. Then, I don't know, you get hungry to learn more.

So I remember working in a, in a snack bar for a while. And um, back then we had, uh, perks Pizza and Sully subs, you know, so we're making subs and, and Perkin's Pizza. So that was fun. Yeah. And um, it was still working at the front desk at the time. And then somewhere along the line we needed help in the. And, um, our head mechanic needed help with some preventive maintenance and, and just catching calls on the weekend.

And I thought, oh, that'd be fun. Let's try that too. So, you know, did, did my little stint for a couple years as a mechanic. Not really, let's not say mechanic. Um, let's say pinch chaser. Pinch chaser. Yeah. Pinch chaser, you know, not mechanic. Probably is overselling it a little bit, but Sure. Um, and then when I left the back end, there was a position that opened up for manage.

So I jumped in management and then from there on, um, worked with the youth bowlers, um, you know, lead coordinator for a while. Uh, you, you know, bowling business, you do a little bit of everything, right. Marketing. Mm-hmm. . Um, and then they asked me in 2013 if I would come, they had just bought this location here in Melbourne and they had asked me if I'd be interested in essentially, um, coming on board as the GM here in Melbourne.

Okay. So that was 2013. and then a lot of stuff happened in between. Then we had a pandemic, and then, um, basically December of last year, I took over as proprietor here at, at Buffalo Lanes in Melbourne, so Oh, wow. Okay. So you, you purchased it. Yeah, that was a goal. That was always a goal. Yeah. It wasn't necessarily a goal, you know, um, coming out of a pandemic before there might be a recession and, and Right.

You know, whatever. But, um, it was something we were working towards. And then when the, um, when the pandemic hit, the Buffalo Brothers were kind of sitting down and they said, you know, it might be a good reset point, might be a good point to, to get. . And, um, so that's what we work towards. And, and it, and it, it happened in, uh, oh wow.

In December 21. So, congratulations. Couple more. Congratulations. Congratulations. Thank you very much. Yeah. Yeah. That's awesome. That's really cool. So now they had how many centers before

and, and you bought, uh, obviously one of 'em. Um, so in total they've had, they've had six, so there's still five locations.

There's, uh, north Raleigh, there's a south Raleigh, which was the original location built back in 70. And then, um, the one where I worked in Carey, uh, they have one in Irwin, North Carolina, this one in Melbourne, and they used to have a center in, in Greensboro, North Carolina. It's now, uh, okay, spare time lanes.

Okay. Oh, wow. Yeah. So then here you are. Uh, I, I find that, you know, there, there's kind of two different paths that I've seen for, for GMs. You get the, the one who's kind of hired in from just management experience, maybe a restaurant or you know, retail or something like that. And then you get the one like you, where you start up from the bottom and, and you become really well-rounded.

And I find that those managers tend to just be rock solid. I hope so. . Um, Yeah. And, and it was, like I said, it just kind of organically happened. Um mm-hmm. probably a year and a half, two years into working at the center. You know, you know, make some friends, you get off work, you want to do something fun. But a lot of the people I worked with, they were bowlers, right?

So they always wanted to bowl after we got off work. And I thought, oh man. You know, bowling's for like old ladies and seniors that are retired, you know, let's do something fun. Let's go to the mall, let's go to the movies. Right? Um, so I would go out on the lanes and thank God there's no, um, you know, video footage,

I was horrible, absolutely horrible. And, uh, I would just kind of throw the balls. They'd go in the gutter, they'd go left, they'd go right wherever they went. Mm-hmm. until, um, you know, whoever was practicing had enough practice and we'd go do something. but one day our pro shop operator, we were bowling in front of his pro shop.

And he probably felt really bad for me. You know, he said, oh, this poor kid, you know, we gotta give him some pointers. Um, he came out and he said, you know, can I give you some pointers? I said, sure. Can't get any worse. Sure. You know, it could only get better. . And, and I remember that that was the day that I fell in love with the sport with bowling.

So he, um, okay. You know, I was probably throwing a 10 pound ball and he said, let's find a different ball. Right. So we picked up a 15 and, you know, went through the typical drill, you know, where are

you standing here? Mm-hmm. . Oh, you know these dots? They, they mean something. Let, let's get you standing here on 22.

Right? And where are you aiming? Um, down there the pin. , you know, okay, well here are the arrows. And so he took some time out of his day, lined me up. I threw a ball, I knocked down pins, and I remember thinking, Oh, this could be fun. Yeah, , that's, that's kind of when I fell in love with bowling and from that point on I wanted to learn more.

Um, so we had a good opportunity where our pro shop op, he was, he was there early every day before his shop opened. And um, and I usually got outta school, you know, so it was high school. I got outta school early, usually didn't start a shift till four or five. Mm-hmm. . And he said, look, great opportunity. I want to go on the lanes, practice myself.

You get free bowling cuz you work at the bowling center. Let's see how good you can get, essentially. Right. So, you know, kind of, we worked through it. At that point, I wanted to learn more about the pro shop business too. So I worked with him in the pro shop, learning about fitting, drilling, ball surfaces, all that exciting stuff.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. and, um, I guess you could say I fell in love with the sport first. Um, I got into youth bowling, you know, really late. Okay. Because by the time I was bowling and competing, oh, I must have been 18 already. Oh, so you had outta high school? Yeah, so then I bowled 18, 19, 20, 21, uh, aged out at 21. And um, and probably those were my, my best years, you know, that was when I was really hungry and I was, I was bowling a lot and I was practicing a lot.

Mm-hmm. . And, um, and then Irwin, who was my coach at the time, he ran the, the pro shop. He warned me, he. He said, just fy, the better you get in the bowling industry, the worst your bowling is gonna get. Okay? Was true. Then I fell in love with the bowling business. And the more I fell in love with the business, then, you know, the bowling kind of, the two 30 hours went to two 20 and then maybe it dropped to two 10.

And, and um, you know, we just started our league I bowl at our carry locations, uh, on Wednesday nights today. Okay. And, um, shockingly, I don't know how I pulled out a 6 97 last week, but I Oh, nice. Yes. You still got it? You still got, it's not gonna be the norm. I mean, I know there'll be some five 90 s and maybe even, you know.

Sure. we'll take right now. The, the bowling is now for me more of, um, it just gets me together with friends. Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's really just the, the vessel, the tool to get me together with people that I haven't seen in a while. And I enjoy bowling. Mm-hmm. , I'm not as competitive as I used to be, so, you know.

Sure. Can I miss this spare? And, and then just kind of. Brush it off and not stress about it right now. I can before I couldn't. Yeah. Cause it's, no, that probably makes it more fun. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, it does. Social. Mm-hmm. , it's, it's absolutely a blast. And we've, we've had fun with it. You know, one year we bowled opposite handed the entire league.

One year we bowled, two handed, you know, and, um, it, it just, it took. Um, competitiveness out of it. Yeah. And it just brought us back to the basics why, why we got into bowling to begin with. Yeah. And, and at the end of the day, that's what it's all about, right? It's, it's about getting together with friends, social, something fun to do.

Um, absolutely. Yeah. That's really what it comes down to. And really the whole industry, right? So, you know, fa, family fun. That's, that's what it all comes down to is getting together with family, friends, giving people some fun. I think that's why I also like the, um, kind of the buffalo. Version of bowling. Um, all of our centers are alcohol free.

uh, emphasis is on the sport of bowling. So obviously we do the cosmic bowling and the black light bowling and, you know, all of our locations have arcades and yeah, some form of food and beverage. But really, um, we emphasize the sport of bowling. We want to teach people how to bowl. We want to teach them how to enjoy it more.

Whether they become a league bowler for life or they just come with their friends or family. Um, we want them to enjoy the sport of bowling. So that's kind of, that's what we've always focused. And it's done well for the Buffalo family and for myself, um, for 44 years going on 45 and mm-hmm. . And that is how I plan on running the business moving forward, is we will always, you know, cater to the open bowlers, but really, um mm-hmm.

we're passionate about the sport. Yeah. So, so tell me a little bit, you know, there's always that debate of how, how do you reconcile the two, you know, the open play versus the league. What, what do you guys do? Is it, it is about what days you schedule it or how do you, uh, blend the two together successfully?

Yeah. It, it's tough and, and honestly, I've, I've already decided in my mind that I will compromise open play to get somebody bowling better. So, for example, this, this summer, um, we did a learnable better. Um, and we had 68 people that signed up for it. And it was much better turnout than what we anticipated.

I mean, it's an 18 lane center. We're in a small community. It's very grow. I mean, it's booming, but um, it's a small center and we thought we were getting a lot of feedback from our bowlers, and I think a lot of it was covid related. You know, some legacy bowlers that. have bowled every season back to back to back for years and years and years.

Mm-hmm. and here they just took a break. You know, COVID, we were, we were closed for six months here at our location. Oh wow. Okay. So half, half a year completely shut down. And then when we reopened, um, you know, masks on social distancing, so yeah. Before we got some of the league bowlers back in the house, it had been a.

And I'd never heard so many people saying, oh, you know, my game. Uh, just not feeling it. You know, people that would normally not say, I need help with my bowling game, right? Were saying I need help with my bowling game, right? So we sat down and thought, well, let's develop a program. We did a 12 week program.

We included some options for some equipment too, because sometimes people are sitting on that ball that was drilled 15 years ago. And, um, sometimes the equipment is part of the fix, right? Mm-hmm. , you, you have to have modern equipment in your hand to really. But we did a learnable class and we opened up all 18 lanes on on Thursday evening in the summer.

And um, and basically we told ourselves that we were gonna put that time and that effort into teaching people how to bowl better. Okay. And that's what we did. So, I mean, it is, you have to yourself kind of look and say, you know, what am I willing to give? What am I what? What am I willing to get? So some people would've probably looked at that and said, oh man, you gave up your entire Thursday evening.

You know, you could have had the lanes full with open play. But again, for me, we had, we had 68 bowlers. They came out of the program more confident about their bowling, getting ready for the fall season. And, um, and again, we're, we're about the sport. You can find, you know, you, you have to. Really per center, per location, per demographic.

You know, everybody has a little different situation. They might be 40% league play, 60% open play. Right. It, it's different from center to center. Um, our league play and tournament play is probably closer in, in our, in this location here, maybe like 35, 40%. Um, but it, um, it's something that we're always gonna put time and effort into, so, right.

Even if I have to. Um, say sacrifice some open play lanes to get a, a learnable club on, or, or whatever it may be. Um, we're always gonna do that because we know that that'll pay off for us in, in the future. Right. Yeah. And I mean, you know, a lot of the open play people are, are really looking at Friday, Saturday primarily.

So, you know, as long as you have those open, you're gonna get, you know, 80% or more of your open play people anyway. Absolutely. And then this becomes, you know, leagues, leagues are during the week and then, you know, open play's the weekend. Absolutely. And you definitely, you gotta make sure that you're, um, you're communicating that to the community because people get really frustrated if they know, if they know Monday nights it's just a full house.

Great. Right. They can plan accordingly if they know Tuesday is a full house. Um, I think the communication is important, so we always have Yeah. You know, updated schedule, whether it's on our social media or our website, because that, that seems to be the most frustrating, is when somebody comes in with a family, right.

And all the lanes are running, you know, and it's. Like, oh, when are we gonna get a lane? Um, oh, Lee just started and um, they won't finish for another two and a half, three hours, so. Right. Um, yeah. You know that I think as long as they know what they've got and they can plan for Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or if you have a gap Right.

Somewhere during the week, that that helps. Exactly. Yeah. Absolutely. So, um, you know, that gives us a little bit about your center and, and you, let's talk a little bit today about what's working at your center. So, you know, we, we put this together to try to share insights about what's working and, and share it with different proprietors.

Uh, what would you say is working for you guys today at, at your center? Yeah. Um, sometimes you have to look outside of your bullying center. So when I think. When I think of what we have here, we have a a 32,000 square foot, uh, bowling center with an arcade and a, and a kitchen. And, um, most of us call 'em party rooms, but these rooms can really be used for anything.

Yeah. Purpose. I have always had, um, kind of the viewpoint that we're here in the community. We have to be really visible in the community and we have to offer ourselves as a community center too, not just a bowling. So what's worked well for us here at this location now and you know, the last few years was, was always getting involved with community events.

Okay. Whether it was going to the, the spring fling at the local school. or Autumn Fest downtown or hosting a car show. We've done a couple car shows here. Oh, cool. Um, in the parking lot with the, you know, local police department, fire department. And then we just reached out to a, um, a car club in the area and hosted a car show.

And some people would say, well, what does that do for your bowling? It doesn't necessarily do anything immediately for the bowling, but it, it gives you visibility so people they see, okay, Buffalo Lanes, they're involved, they like, they like being active in the community and they might just show up for a car show and a cup of coffee and then walk into the center and say, We need to have Forrest birthday here next time.

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So we've always been very, very involved with what's going on in our, in our local downtown, and then just in, in Melbourne as a whole. Okay. So I find that that really helps, um, in center education. So education, again, whether they're gonna become a league bowler or whether they're just gonna become a, a casual open bowler or a frequent casual open bowler.

I think when, when you, um, when you educate people and teach 'em how to throw a ball better, they enjoy the sport more. And again, oh yeah, the ball doesn't need to be, let's turn 'em into a league bowler. Mm-hmm. , it could literally be let's get 'em a ball in their hand that fits and as the proper weight so that when they bowl their hand doesn't hurt afterwards.

Right. So yeah, I think education is important. Whether the end goal is league bowler or just to get some of those frequent open bowlers a little bit more happy and, and knocking down more pins and you know, there's always this, well, my hand should hurt after I'm done bowling. No, it shouldn't, you know?

Right. So we need to find you something that fits better or maybe you're throwing too light or too heavy. Um, but the education has been helping a lot. And then again, I saw. Um, and look, the guys at p a and the education department, they're awesome. Mm-hmm. , we work with them a lot. Um, bar Berger and Gerald and Kelly and all those guys, they're, they're super and they're super on top of what's going on.



and um, I agree that it's not just about customer service anymore, it's, it's about the, the guest experience. Yes. So from when they walk in the door to when they engage with your staff to when they go on the lanes to when they exit the building, it's about the experience. And we can nail that in a small center, in a small community, because I, I know almost everyone by their.

Yeah. So when they walk in the door, Hey, Fort, how's it going? You know, should I tell the kitchen to get you a Diet Pepsi? And, uh Right. You know, the usual pair for an hour of bullying. And, um, but it's, and it's, it's also, when it comes to employee retention, it's the same thing if you, um, , if the experience in the center is enjoyable, then you will attract good people and you'll retain Yeah.

Good people. Absolutely. So again, it's about that guest experience and it, um, and it, it it's multiple things that add up to just one thing. So you can't really mm-hmm. it, it's about the customer service. It's about the cleanliness of the center. It's about the, um, the promotions and the pricing. It, it's really, it's, it's the whole package and, and those.

Plug, plug at the p a education department that they could help you figure it out. But it's, um, it's no longer about, you know, the shirt and the customer service and then my pleasure. It's, it's about the whole experience from when they, when they ex, you know, really the first touch is, is probably on social media, so, yeah.

You know, they're gonna find you on Google or they're gonna find you on Facebook or Twitter, wherever it may be. Yep. And um, and that's really the first. And then it goes from there. Then they show up to the center. Is your, is your parking lot clean? Um, is the front of the building, does it look good or is there their paint peeling off?

Mm-hmm. , when you walk in the door, what are you smelling? Um, old socks. Um, fresh pizza, um, you know, whatever it may be. That, those are all things they haven't even got to your staff yet, right? They haven't even got to the front desk yet. . And then there is it simple? Do they know what's going on? Um, are there 40 different flyers popping out in your face and you don't know this price, that package, this special, um, steering people in the right direction.

Um, so it, that guest experience I think is really important nowadays because, um, when the wallets get a little bit tighter too, people want to spend their money where they feel they're getting a lot of bang for their buck. Absolutely. And they wanna feel important. They want to feel like they're getting value.

And if they're gonna come back, that guest experience is a really important part of it. Absolutely. Now is, is that something that you have like drawn out or mapped out somewhere or just something you have in your head? Or how do you approach kind of making all those small little improvements all the time?

I think it's just been. You know, live and learn over the years. Mm-hmm. , I've had a lot of good mentors. Um, the Buffalo Brothers, um, always were open to sending us to places where we could get education, right. Whether it was b p a or, or whether it was here or there. Um, I've just had a lot of good managers that I've worked underneath.

um, a lot of good mentors. Um, Irwin Atkinson was the original manager at the first Buffalo Lane Center. This is the guy who taught me how to bowl the one that was running the pro shop, and he runs our pro shop now. Okay. So not retired yet? Um, yeah, but he, um, he's still running the shop here and I'm happy to have him here and, and I wish I could have 'em for another 30 years.

Um, just gained a lot of experience through him. Um, he's done a lot of different things in the bowling industry. Mm-hmm. , um, somebody that I have a lot of respect for too. Paul Kres, he, uh, he owns and operates the center in Mooresville, not, we just had him on show and I've had the opportunity to work with him.

Lot. And, and we just have very similar mindsets on, on how to treat customers and how to get people in the door. Mm-hmm. . So it, it's, it's just something that's kind of evolved and developed over time. Um, you know, and it's something that I try to, I try to, you can't really map it, you can't put it in a manual per se, some of these things.

Right. Um, I try to lead by example. I see. So I'm, I'm still very active in the center. Um, it's probably why I look so rough. I just finished a long. . Um, but, um, I like to be out and engaging with the customers and I feel like I, I can kind of show the rest of the team that extra level, right? Yeah. Sometimes you just have to expose them to that and show 'em what it looks like.

You can train for it. Um, a lot of these on-demand classes that B P A does, you know, it kind of gives a good be. Understanding in certain sections, you know how to answer to a phone, how to navigate through customer complaints, like I think that is a phenomenal tool that all proprietors managers should be using unless they already in center have some sort of onboarding program.

If you have an onboarding program, awesome. Right then, then it's working for you. But if you don't, it's, it's, it's completely laid out for you already. And like I I said, everything from how you answer the phone to, to how you ha handle a customer complaint, c p r I mean, the list of classes that they're offering now is, is massive.

It's not there yet. I think education is super important. Yep. Yeah, they, they do a great job of it. The bowling university, uh, that you get as just for being a member. It's pretty impressive. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So it's great and, and I think that was probably what was lacking in the industry before I got into it.

So, you know, I kept hearing about the, you know, the glory days, the good old days, the third shift leagues, and you know, all this stuff. And you know, they were doing market research and analysis and they were telling proprietors and owners, you need to clean up your centers. Less smoking, you know, brighter colors.

And then I guess the ones that didn't do it are probably not with us anymore. And the ones that changed and evolved are, but again, um, the bowling industry is a great industry to be in. And the people that are doing well, they're, they're working hard and they're educating mm-hmm. . So it's not as easy as just build a center, open it up, um, and you'll be prosperous.

I think you do have to work hard. You have to train and hire the right staff. Uh, you have to attract the right people, and you have to offer that guest experience that has to be the right experience. Right. And so you're saying it's, it's almost like a, a, a philosophy that you try to instill in your, your staff more than just, here's a list of SOPs and, and how we do this.

Absolutely. Absolutely. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. And I, I find that, uh, not only are they hardworking, the, the successful proprietors, but uh, also very open-minded where they, they talk to a lot of different proprietors, see what's working, and always putting new ideas into the center so that they don't, you know, cuz sometimes people fall behind.

But the people who do really well, like, uh, you know, Paul, like, like I said, the way he just talked to, he's always evolving and always adding new ideas and what's working today. Yeah, I mean, and, and look, we had, we had an interesting situation when, when I came here to Melbourne, we had bought a business that had three different ownerships and three years.

And so we kind of had to do rebranding this, this didn't start as a Buffalo Lanes here. Um, and it was completely different than what we did large bar. More about the open bowling, less about the actual sport. So when we got here, we had three years that we kind of had to, um, overcome and erase. Right? And, and it was tough.

And, uh, the center did not do well initially. You know, there were some really rough years and that's when we would do all this gorilla marketing, go to every school, every event, and they would look at us and say, well, you're just, you're the same thing with a different name. No, we're not, you know, it's, it's, please come and, and just give us a chance.

And, um, and so it was tough. And at that time you have to be open to ideas. So we would have meetings. Majority of my staff over the years, very young. And um, I'm probably the least arrogant person when it comes to, I think I know everything. So sometimes we would just sit in the room and say, Anyone have any good ideas?

Um, and it's amazing if you listen to your staff, um, even the young ones, um, a lot of these ideas over the years that worked, it wasn't, didn't come from me, it came from my 17 year old, uh, front desk employee. Sure. You know? So again, it was like, we've got this huge parking lot. Have you ever thought of doing a, uh, you know, like a 4th of July celebration of parking?

No, but that sounds like a great idea, right? Um, have we ever done a car show, you know, like, and then maybe involve some people downtown? We have a big parking lot. Sounds great. Um, the party rooms sit empty during the week, you know, because you're not doing parties. Um, what if somebody wanted to rent it out for a Bible study or, you know, yeah.

A book reading club or, you know, things like, things like that. You know, utilizing just, and again, at that point it was more about just getting people in the door. So that they could realize what we were offering was completely different than, than the previous business. Right. Right. Um, so it was really our goal at that time was getting people in the door, not necessarily teaching and bowling or, but um, but yeah, just, just being open to ideas and then your customers, sometimes your customers, you know, will, Hey, have you ever thought of this?

Nope. But we should try it. Right. And um, and the worst that happens is if it doesn't work and then you, you know, you scratch it off and you move. Yeah, you'll never know unless you try. So I think a lot of proprietors managers, they, they might be afraid. So it, it might be one of those things, we always did it this way.

Right. But always did it this way. Doesn't, at some point it doesn't work. Right. Yeah. We made a change. Um, many, you know, we change made so many changes that when you have an established center that's doing. Well, maybe not thriving, but it's doing okay. You're a little bit more afraid to maybe make a change here.

Right. Really. You know, we were struggling those first couple years, so it was kind of like we've got nothing to lose. So it was a little Exactly. It was a little easier to pull the trigger on some of those things. So I understand somebody might be sitting in the center. They're making payroll, they're paying the bills, they're putting some money aside, and they're thinking, eh, I don't know if I wanna rock the boat.

Right. Rock the boat. Because really the worst that happens is you try something, it doesn't work, and you move on. You move on to something different and there aren't bad. You show that, um, that you're willing to try things, you know, you're, you're willing, you're, you're trying, you're trying to put, make things better, you know, just to customers and employees.

Yeah. The, the staff. The staff sees. Your customers see that and then, and then they realize, wait a minute, they're here to stay. They're, they're trying, they're working through things. So, but yeah, I, I think you really have to be open-minded and, and you have to constantly educate yourself. So we go to a lot of these trade shows.

We go to Bo Expo. Okay. We have a good regional trade show here, the Bpa A of the Carolinas in Georgia. And I try to go as often as I can, um, because there's always something that you could. also, a lot of times you go to these events, there's so much information being slammed at you, um, you can't possibly take it all back.

Right? So sometimes it's nice going to a, a show and then saying, wait a minute, I remember learning about this three years ago. Why didn't I, why didn't I act on that? Yeah. You know, so it's, I think education's important. Keeping an open mind is important. Listening to your staff, because a lot of the. , um, they're seeing things that you might not be seeing.

You might be in the office more. Um, right. So they, they have some phenomenal ideas. Don't write 'em off because it's their first job and, and they haven't been in the bowling industry for 24 years. Right. Um, because they've got some really good ideas. You just gotta be able to pull the trigger, follow through, implement, and then be able to measure and say, well, did it work?

Did it not work? Um, it didn't work this time. Let's move on. Try something new. Um, or it might be the next big. Right. Yeah. There's only one, one way to find out. So I, that, that's just always, and that's been my thing. You know, I've, I kind of, that mindset I got from my, my mom and dad too, and just family members and then people that have always been around me is, is just don't, don't be afraid to learn.

Don't be afraid to grow. Don't be afraid to try new things. You know, I, I can actually remember before I came to me, um, I had actually gotten to a place at Buffalo Lanes in Carrie. Where that growth had kind of stopped. Mm-hmm. I got very comfortable. So, you know, you, you kind of, you've done everything, you know, you're, you know, the front desk, you know the snack bar, you know the ins and outs of the parties.

You know, if there's a squealing coming from Lane 13, you know that there's a pin in the turn pan and you know, you feel like the fawns after a while, you know, you just Right. You know where to hit things and what to do, and, but then you get to a point where you get so comfortable, you, you almost don't realize that you're not grow.

So I remember when I left Carrie and I came to Melbourne. Um, it had been a long time since I was afraid of something. Hmm. Yeah, because everything was kind of, you get so comfortable and you get so familiar with things, um, you kind of forget what it's like to learn something new or, or, you know, And that's kind of where I had gotten, I was so comfortable at Carrie.

Mm-hmm. And the thought of moving to Melbourne, it was, uh, you know, different people, different demographic at our care location, everything was Brunswick. Here we're working with Cubic Amm F so I don't know anything about these 90 xLi. Sure. You know, I, I'm pretty good with an A two, but I don't know anything about 90 xLi.

Mm-hmm. , and, you know, the, the computer system's completely different. Uh, at Carey, we had a snack bar here, it's like a full kitchen. So I'm like, wow. Now, now I'm a Rerate tour, right? I don't know about this . So it was, it was a lot of, you know, it was kind of, it, it needed to happen. . But I think a lot of people, they get comfortable at some point and then they forget that, that if they're comfortable, they're not growing, they're not evolving, right.

They're not moving forward. So I've had a lot of uncomfortable moments here since 2013. Mm-hmm. . Um, so I guess for me, making change or trying something new, um, it's gotten a lot easier.

And really when Covid hit, um, a lot of people were maybe afraid of, you know, opening their center making change. For me it was just like, let's get back to work and, and, and let's do it.

You know, I've, I actually felt like the years leading up to Covid were a lot more challenging. So, you know, we were close six months and when we opened, um, you know, we followed all the guidelines and, uh, it was just another day at work. It was nice being back at work. It was nice seeing people bowling and um, and we did what we had to until business started picking up.

Right. You know, again, it wasn't, I didn't, I didn't come into work like this. I came into work thinking great, you know, now we can get back up and running. Yeah. And um, sometimes you need a couple of those rough years that kind of test you a little bit and push you to let you know that, and it's not afraid.

Shouldn't be afraid to make changes and you shouldn't be afraid to adapt. And, and sometimes we get so comfortable, um, we get stagnant and then, you know, eventually, uh, things die. Right. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, and it almost pre one precludes the other, you know, if you're comfortable, you're, you're probably not learning, you know, and if you're learning, you're probably not comfortable.

You know, they're almost mutually exclusive. Yeah, absolutely. Mm-hmm. . Um, yeah, so I really like that. I really like your approach and, um, you know, it's interesting to see how some people reacted to the, the harder times with Covid when they were close. Some people were afraid. Some people. Took the time to, to, you know, clean up, you know, like literally clean or, or do renovation.

Yeah. Just things that, you know, they were, they needed to do that. They just say, well, we're shut down, let's take care of it now. And then, you know, not everyone makes it through restaurants, close bars close, there's half the places to go out and now there's the same people. And now we're seeing the people who made it through do have, you know, a really good 18 months.

Yeah, you, you actually brought up some good memories. Um, essentially we were, we were all laid off at that point, right? And, um, I was the, the volunteer caretaker at the bowling center. So I would, you know, come in and just make sure everything was still there. And, um, yeah, I'd bring the lawnmower from the house and I'd mow the lawn around the property.

Sure. Yeah. Um, but a couple of my, my employees reached out to me and they said, man, we're so bored. Like, we just wanna get outta the house and do so. I said, well, I mean, you know, we were

talking about cleaning that back room up for a long time. You know, we could clean it up and Oh, we had gallons of paint at the bowling center.

I was like, we have a little painting party and, you know, freshen up the walls, right? And so there were, there were a couple days, and I mean, we all did this, we're, we're all essentially laid off, unemployed, and, um, you know, and, and I said, well, look, I'll buy dinner, but I'm unemployed too. So, you know, it's gotta be like Taco Bell or Dominoes

So we had dominoes. And we were sitting here painting, you know, cleaning video games, vacuuming out video games, you know, doing all those things. Sometimes you get behind, but it just brought back a good memory because yeah, we, we did a lot of cleaning in different ways, but we also did exactly some real cleaning.

So, but that, that was a good memory at, you know, just everybody just wanted to get back and it wasn't about, you know, money or anything. It's just like, we want to get back in the center, we wanna see the center, let's like, let's do something. Right. Right. And um, so yeah, we had, we had a couple, couple of those fun days where we brought people in and just, you know, just had a good time.

And there was no bowling, you know, people asked, you know, oh, you're bowling a lot, you know, during the pandemic. And I said, Nope. Lanes are s. You know, lane machine was put up, you know, everything was pumped out. You know, oil tank, res reservoirs, everything empty. So I said, no, no, no. Bowling can't, can't afford electricity right now.

No. Yeah. People don't realize how much it is just to turn the lights on or, you know, run machines. Oh yeah. . Yeah. I love that. Well, so, uh, you know, I do wanna keep us on time. I know I, I only asked you for a half hour, but, uh, what would be. Tell me a little bit about your outlook on the next three years or so.

So looking after the future, where do you see the, uh, the bowling industry going in, in the next three, three years? Oh, man, if I knew that, if I knew that, I'd tell you to turn the record button off and I'd start selling that information. . Um, I think definitely people are, some of it was covid, some of it was already coming.

People, people are looking to get together and engage with each other. Um, and, and they're finding different ways of doing that. Um, I love bowling because bowling is something that literally everyone



can do. So, so my appeal to bowling, to the sport, why I love the industry so much is that it, it's really something that everybody can do.

When you come in on a busy league night and you look from lane one to lane 18 or 16 or 24, 32 or whatever, um, you see. Just people, right? And, and there's left, there's right, there's up, there's down, there's black, there's white, there's middle class, there's upper class. Um, there's left-handed, there's right-handed.

Um, bowling is one of those interesting sports that brings everyone together. And, um, sometimes I laugh you, you know, we'll, we'll have a, a team bowling, another team, and that one team is probably very, left leaning politically, and the other team is very right leaning politically. Mm-hmm. And somehow they make it through the night bowling.

Nobody's hurt each other, you know? Right. Nobody's, and sometimes they go out to eat afterwards. Yeah. , you know, and I'm thinking, where else can you do that? Um, but I guess, yeah, I guess I'm, I'm gonna see, like, personally, I think in our. We're gonna see an uptick of, of league bowling. I think people are trying to get into, into more, like I said, they're trying to socialize more.

They were just locked up for a couple years and they're trying to find more sanctioned or non sanctioned. Hmm. Um. Both. Okay. Both. I mean, maybe it's U S B C. Maybe it's the P B A PBA League experience. I mean, whatever it may be. Just mean, I think just getting people on the lanes is important. Yeah. Yeah.

Well, just cuz I, I see a lot of, uh, social lanes or shorter lanes or non, you know, traditional, uh, not, uh, sorry, leagues, shorter leagues, uh, more like a social leagues popping up. I'm just curious if you see just the desire to, for people to get together where they just wanna go out and bowling's a, you know, easy sport that's accessible and they get together.

Or if it's more the competitive side, if, if, which one you see? Um, yeah, probably not the competitive side. I, I see more the, the socializing. Okay. Um, we're looking probably to adding some duck pin bowling in the center. Okay. Um, and it, it, it probably won't be a regulation duck pin length, so again, it won't be something that's sanctioned, but mm-hmm.

if we end up doing leagues or if we end up doing competition with them, we'll we'll do some in-house awards. Yeah. Um, you know, and make it really exciting. We don't have to sanction with the

duck and association. . Um, you know, so we can do that ourselves. Um, but no, probably, I, I don't know. I, I see a little bit of the competitiveness dying off, but I also see mm-hmm.

the excitement coming back with some of the U B A bowling, the federation bowling, like it, yeah. It's a different type of bowling. Mm-hmm. , um, . And I think that's good for the sport too, because you, you kind of, you need a little bit of that. I remember, right. Um, I did not bowl collegiately, but I, I did some coaching.

So with the NC State, um, bowling team mm-hmm. , there's, there's nothing like that. There's nothing like having a team and going to, uh, you know, bowling bakers tournaments and things like that. Um, we always told our athletes that were on the college team, like savor every. because when the four years are gone, they're gone.

Yeah. And you'll probably find nothing like that in bowling again. Right. Um, because it is just a, it's a unique experience and, and I think Federation and U B A and some of those organizations, it brings kind of that feeling to people that maybe, maybe they had experience sit in college or maybe they never had the opportunity to be a part of a team like that and compete against other teams and travel.

So I, I do like some of those formats. Um, But, um, yeah, I, I see bowling growing more, um, on the social side. And the fu like I said, for me, bowling is about fun now. Right. So I don't need to shoot 200 s anymore to enjoy it. Yeah. You know, I, I just want to get out, I wanna meet some people. I want to, I wanna see some old faces.

I want to, you know, my team on Wednesday nights, we all used to work at Buffalo Lane's, Carey at some. Okay. Wow. The, the majority of them are all outta the bowling business. I'm the only one that's still in the bowling industry, , and sometimes the story comes up and it says, Hey, you remember on a Saturday night after we closed for cosmic bowling, we used to go out and do this.

and I can still tell them, yeah, I did that last weekend. What are you talking about? ? You know, just with a different crew. It's just different times. But, um, sometimes I think, you know, they're a little jealous of me and I said, well, you know, there's shoes spraying, there's shoe tying too. You know, it's all, it's not all fun and games, but, um, we sit down and we bowl and, and sometimes it's like, remember when we used to do this?

I, yeah, I did that last Saturday, right? That Saturday we had to waffle. Three in the morning and, you know, went back to bowling and, you know, shot some pool and played arcade. So yeah, I'm a, I'm a big kid, you know, you have to have fun too. Right? Absolutely. Like, like we were saying that that's what it's all about.

Yeah. Okay. So, but yeah, definitely that social aspect. Um, I think, um, if you can. this year, especially this, this upcoming year and the end of this year, we're looking to really get involved in the community again. So obviously we were shut down for Covid. Um, when we reopened it was, it was me and one other person, so it was, we closed pre covid with 26 people on staff, I think.

And then when we reopened, we had two. Oh, wow. So we were mowing the lawn and, and we were the cleaning crew and we were doing everything. So, um, we just couldn't get involved again with a lot of those community activities and yeah. And some of them weren't going on either. Right. That's true. Sure. We're gonna host another trunk or treat event.

Um, it's the biggest trunk or treat event in, in our area. Yeah. So we get, well, local businesses involved and um, last time we did it, we had 48 cars. Okay. Um, in the parking lot. . Yeah. So that's great. You know, a huge event. But that's kind of what we're looking forward to is, is getting involved again, going to these autumn fests, the, the hometown holidays, the Christmas markets.

Yeah. Chamber of Commerce, engaging with people again. Mm-hmm. , do you do the, uh, chamber of Commerce at all? That's one that Paul was, was really, uh, big on too. He was talking. Paul, Paul's also a Rotarian, so I remember. Um, yes. Yeah, he is. Yeah. Um, we, uh, I founded, I was part of the founding, uh, membership for our rotary club here in Melbourne.

Mm-hmm. When Paul was working with me, he was doing, um, just some, um hmm. Consulting. Or consulting. Thank you. Yeah. Mm-hmm. . I need another cup of coffee. Yeah. . Um, he was doing consulting with us the first couple years here and he said we need to, you know, we absolutely need to hit the local Rotary Club. And I said, there is no Rotary Club in me

So he kind of challenged me. He said, well, you, you need to get one started, you know, and we finally got a good group of people together. Very quick. Um, but yeah, we're, we're involved with Rotary. We have a, um, we're part of the Alamance County CH Chamber, which we, we kind of get swallowed up by Burlington and Graham and some of the other cities in Alamance.

I see. Yeah. So, so Mein founded its own organization called the Mein Business Association. Um, and we have a, we have a meeting actually next Wednesday, and we're very active with the b a. Um, they host one of the longest consecutively running events in North Carolina, which is the Dogwood Festival. Um, okay.

We have a historic downtown association as well, so we are in the historic downtown limits of Melbourne. So, um, we have a historic downtown business association that we're active in. We work with the Chamber on certain things, but again, we kind of, we have an entity that kind of fills the gap of the chamber here.

I see. So, um, we work with the ME Business Association a lot, and, um, I think it's important, you know, it's good for networking. Um, it, it's just, it's nice to know who your neighbor is. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Um, and so, uh, the last one I wanted to ask you on, piggyback on that a little bit is what would be your, uh, number one piece of advice for a proprietor?

So someone like yourself, uh, or maybe a, a year ago who was just about to get started, maybe someone who's at a crossroads, you know, has some big decisions, or, you know, what, what would your be your, your number one piece of advice be to them? Hmm. You could only give one piece of advice for a, uh, proprietor One.

Only one. Um, yeah, I mean, I guess I would say get, get ready for the time of your life. Um, , , it's, you know, there's never a boring day. Yeah. Um, I guess I would say, uh, don't go into it blindly. So obviously I had a lot of experiences. I knew that this is what I wanted to. , um, sometimes I see on these Facebook groups, you know, we, we just bought a bowling center and we've never owned a bowling center before.

Yeah. And I think, oh boy, you know, we can probably talk on the phone for the next four months consecutively, you know, and still not fill the gaps. Right. Um, I, I would say try to educate yourself as much as possible going into it because mm-hmm. , um, It's like an onion. There, there are a lot of layers in a bowling center.

Sure. Um, it's, it's not just as simple as setting the pins up, knocking 'em down, and, you know, it's three 50 a game or whatever it might be. Um, there's a lot going on. Um, you really need to know your community. You need to understand the people that are gonna be visiting your center. Mm-hmm. . Um, you need to understand the staffing requirements.

You need to understand the dynamic of your center. So again, some people have a traditional bowling center. It might just be 24 lanes. Done. Um, we have an 18 lane center, um, with a, a kitchen, uh, you know, arcade that's relatively large. We're looking to expand it. I think we've got a little over 50 pieces right now.

Mm-hmm. , um, some billiards tables, but I, it doesn't really fit with what we do. So again, I, I think we're looking to, to get some duck pin bowling in, you need to understand your center too and, and kind of what you can do with. Um, but yeah, that, that would be my one piece of advice is, is just don't, you know, oh, this is great.

Let's, let's own a bowling center and let's, you really need to understand the layers and what goes into it. Um, you know, maybe educate yourself a little bit beforehand. And then definitely once you're up and running, um, you know, continue with that education. Don't lock yourself in your office or get stuck working the counter where you can't grow.

Yeah, I. I am a little bit of a hypocrite. I even have a sign hanging up. You know, don't get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life. So, I mean, I. You've gotta pull yourself away from the, the, the day-to-day parts of it so that you can help expand the business and expand yourself. So, um, some people, they, they get locked into working the counter.

Well, I can't possibly go to Bull Expo. I mean, who's gonna run the bowling center for me? Right. There's already a problem if you can't leave, you know, so there's, there's already an issue that maybe had you done a little bit more research. So I, I would say, you know, education is key before and then during, and then once you're into it, you know, just constantly if you've, if you can make good connections with other proprietors and managers, um, if they're sharing information from you, uh, they know what they're doing.

If they're not sharing, then, um, It, it's, you know, no, nobody's really competing with each other. We're all here No. To grow the sport of bowling. Um, you sent me an email asking me to come on the podcast. You said sharing is caring and I totally agree. Yeah. Um, I just think the more we can help each other out, the more we can help people, the more we can help the sport of bowling.

Um, and, and the better off we all are. Yeah. So just, just education is key, whether it's your staff, whether it's yourself, um, whether it's your. You know, your customers. Uh, education is one of the top things. Um, when we're making decisions here in a bowling center, we're thinking about education, right? How do we, how do we build up our employees?

You know, how do I improve myself? But then we wanna educate our customers too, you know? Right. If, if you educate the customers about bowling and the sport, um, it's a win-win for everyone. Absolutely. Yeah. I dunno if I could have put it better myself. I've really enjoyed our, our conversation. Um, me too. Like I said, education is, is really critical.

Um, it's important. It's the only way. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. It's important. And again, we can learn so much from each other. Um, people are doing such different things from West coast to east coast. You, you know, and it's something works here, but it's never been done here and Right. Um, certainly there are certain things that maybe will only work regionally in certain areas, but, um, you, you know, and pull yourself outside of your.

Scope of knowledge. So you might know what the eight centers around you are doing, but what are the other eight doing in the next state or on the other side of the country? Yeah. Um, you know, there's, there's just a wealth of information there. And again, that's kind of why I like, um, what Bart Burger and Gerald and Kelly and them are doing.

They're, they're collecting that information. They're disseminating that information. You don't have to drive to California or to Seattle or Right. Wherever to sit down and talk to a proprietor. You can do a Zoom call and there are so many people out there willing to share their knowledge and expertise.

That's true to help people out. Mm-hmm. , you just have to know where to get it. Right. You know, you just have to reach out and be willing and open to listen. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, if, if that weren't the case, this show wouldn't exist. You know, that's the whole idea is let's reach out to people because, you know, we have the, the, uh, BP a a to in their university.

We have the bowl expo. But, you know, in between that, there's, there's not as many, you know, spots to, to talk to some of these people who are busy. They're more than happy to share if you ask 'em. But how do we take that from the, you know, from them and, and share that with the world? So, absolutely. That's why we're here.

Yeah. So, yeah, I, I don't think we could end on a better one. Um, that's the mission of it. Um, I do really appreciate you taking out your time, Brian. This has been, uh, a blast. You, you have a, a lot of knowledge, you know, like, like you said, 25 year career and, you know, just barely touching 40. Yeah. We're just, just barely, just barely touching the surface.

I enjoyed it exactly for asking me to come on, and, and again, I think, um, if people just, if they open their eyes a little, if they get out of their comfort zone, um, they're, they're gonna be a big success in this industry. They just, they just gotta be willing to take that little bit of a step. Yep. That's the whole thing.

Right. Awesome. Yeah. Well, well, thank you Brian. Um, w w I'm sure we'll, uh, we'll chat again, but like I said, I appreciate it and this has been fun. Thanks Fort. I appreciate it. And thank you for everything you do for our industry too. Absolutely. We'll see ya.