

We LOVE what we're doing! We LOVE our customers! It's just tough getting people taken care of right now.

What's written below was posted in a cycling-industry-only private Facebook group, detailing what it's like, working in bicycle retail, right now. Please note that all of us in bicycle retail are honored by the support our customers have shown us throughout the Covid-19 crisis. But none of us were prepared to see the instrument of our trade and love, the bicycle, suddenly become key to mentally and physically getting through these strange times we live in. So please, do not read this as shops being frustrated with customers. Rather, it's shops frustrated that we can't do a better job of taking care of them.

And by the way, the author is me. --Mike

It's soooooo stressful on staff to have people lined up outside the door, waiting to come in. I don't think someone on "the other side" (the consumer) can possibly understand what we go through. We WANT to get them taken care of!

I don't think anyone quite figured out what the effect of not allowing people to come in and browse would actually be. Very early on, we figured it would be a filter, something that would slow down the number of people coming to see us, but those people that did would be more likely to buy something.

They ARE more likely to buy something. No question. But it doesn't stop, the phone rings off the hook, and you never get that chance to run to the bathroom or grab something to eat because that would mean people would be waiting longer to buy... an inner tube? How long should someone have to wait just to buy a tube?

The phone. So now the phone, when we can answer it, is all about making sure we can take care of what they need if they come in. So when they ask if we're open, what our hours are, we have to interrogate them to make sure whatever reason they want to see us is reasonable. They might be long-time customers who buy bikes from us on a regular basis and have no idea there are no bikes under \$2k on our floor. I want to have conversations where we tell people how we can take care of their immediate need or itch.

The surprises come frequently, the very wonderful people who take it all in stride and, if a bike isn't going to come in for two or three months, that's OK, here's payment in full or a deposit, they're happy to have something coming. But maybe one-third don't believe the bike shortage is real, that you're not telling them the truth when you say there's a bike that will be available for them in just two weeks, which is awesome, you should put a deposit on it! They leave, and then come back three days later saying they want that bike. But it's gone to someone else and the next one is two months away.

And the repairs. It's our fault that the backlog is so long. Yes, it's our fault that many shops have closed over the years. It's our fault that we're popular, it's our fault that we can't instantly find quality bike mechanics and ramp things up, it's our fault we can't store so many bikes and have to go to appointment-only basis.

And so many will say, can I get my bike in sooner if someone cancels? And we have to explain to them that we're like the airlines and overbook, expecting some don't show up, but sometimes we end up working late hours and reschedule what's left of our lives because all the appointments DID show up.

Periodically we call up other shops to see if someone's in much better shape so we can refer repairs to them. But they're not. Best I've found lately is a month out for service.

It's not our customer's fault that we are susceptible to such stress right now. And it's a whole lot better than losing your livelihood as has happened to so many in the restaurant business. We need to be, we should be, more grateful for our situation. But I expect many of us will develop health issues far more long-term and serious than Covid-19 from this. Poor eating habits, stress, and wanting to take a hammer to my iWatch every time it tells me to take a moment and "breathe." I fondly recall the days I worried about weight gain. Now I'm working my butt off trying not to lose too much.

There. It's not like I can say I got it out of my system though, because I know, it starts all over again tomorrow.