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What I learned I already knew

The best plans, those where everything seems to fall into place... why are those plans the ones that most often go awry? As we look to ways to remodel our aging Redwood City store, I've been checking out other businesses, bike shops and otherwise, for inspiration. Yesterday afternoon I got the idea of taking the train to Burlingame to visit Summit Bicycles, because it's only a block from the station and there were trains coming & going that would give me an hour to check things out. Perfect! Walk 10 minutes from our shop to the train station, 18 minutes on the train, an hour there, 18 minutes back... who needs a car for a quick trip?

Except that you get off the train, consult google on your iPhone, and discover you were looking at the wrong station; the station adjacent to Summit has been closed for a year and I've got a bit over a mile walk ahead of me. Each way. 20 minutes of the 60 spent just getting there!

Why didn't I bring my BikeFriday on the train? Probably because I thought I was only walking 100 meters or so!

Still a productive trip; Les graciously showed me around his place, and helped continue my journey along the path that says more is not always better. In Redwood City, we have 27 models of shoes. Summit has 12. Over the years we naturally want to expand our selection to take care of anything someone might want, but along the way clutter and confusion are an unavoidable result. I've long had a saying that you can only show someone three different models or versions of something they're interested in. More than that and you're just confusing them and they'll leave with nothing. Customers come in for solutions, not a salesperson's ability to recite the virtues of 10 different shoes.

It's almost as if we don't know what's best when we have "everything" and of course, we can't possibly know everything about everything in the first place. Much better to have a lot of knowledge about fewer things, than a little knowledge about many.

Less stuff presented better. Wider aisles, better lines of sight (so customers can find things easier and we can find customers), fewer lines, maybe even fewer models within a line. (Becky, who handles apparel in our Redwood City store, isn't going to like it when I explain that we can't stock all 5 colors a jersey might come in, but only two or three.)

31 years at this and I'm still learning. It's tough though because most every bike shop starts small and you struggle to bring in enough merchandise to have what your customers need, so as you grow, and can afford it, you naturally want... more! But what we should be doing with that 31 years of experience is to use it as a tool to zero in on what's relevant and a good value for our customers. That will also reduce the number of times I come across something and say "We still have this???!! It was questionable when we first brought it in and now, 4 years later...."

Nothing new here, nothing I haven't known all along if I had stopped to think about it.