Plain Talk

Let's rethink this thing

COLUMN BY ROB BUKSAR



I think our diminished national circumstances are making us all a little crazy. There was a time when folks and businesses alike seemed to do the right thing because that is just what we did. Now, good principles have to be legislated. Standards of excellence and honesty could become the exception instead of the rule.

If you're seeing clearly, bad things occur when there isn't enough to go around. There is no longer enough to go around in the USA. Electrical rebuilding is one of the last American small businesses surviving and we are losing the fight. Aside from the fact that basic overhead costs are becoming impossible to contend with, we also have a rapidly diminishing market which continues to shrink.

Do you remember when we started in the business? Sixty percent of the nation's need for aftermarket parts was supplied by independently-owned shops. Now the bulk of the business is dominated by huge corporations via Chinese and Mexican manufacturing.

So, here is what it all boils down to: I think all of us small guys are becoming predators. As small businesspeople, we no longer have a seat at the table, no matter what the present administration says. We are beating each other up over the crumbs. Have you ever seen a wildlife show where two predators are competing over the remains of the dead carcass? It's fierce, wild and ugly as they hurt each other trying to feed. If it sounds familiar, it ought to. It far too often resembles us.

Time for an opinion check. Do you think the small local rebuilder on the other side of town is really your competitor and maybe even the enemy? I don't think so! The sooner we all get a handle on this, the better our chances of survival. As long as our perspectives and opinions are skewed and confused, the real enemy will continue to devour us at will.

I did an ERE article back in 1998 called, "Who is your competition?" (February issue, page 3). It's about two guys who owned pizza parlors on the same side of town. Both places were suffering declining sales and each owner thought the other guy was capturing his business. This misconception triggered a course of crazy commercial antics on both sides that just about destroyed them, similar to what we're doing in electrical rebuilding. Nevertheless, the real culprits in both cases were and still are the mammoth corporations who have declared war on the small guy and are winning because we don't know who the real enemy is.

We once had a slightly regulated economy which had some rules. This allowed the small to coexist with the large. Problem is the big guy lobbied Congress and had the rules thrown away in the name of free market. It sounds good on paper and in a political debate. However, without a few rules, the big fish will always eat the smaller ones until the big fish is all that remains.

Friends, take a pause and step back and reconsider your thoughts, opinions and actions. The little shop across town or the one-man operation working out of his garage are not your competition. They are working the same side of the street with the same circumstances as you. Find a way to retrieve some of the business from the big corporations who took it and not your domestic neighbor who has none of it.

God bless America.

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