

**Tea with Tom: Coffee Shop Best Practices with Pastor Bill & Alicia of Higher Grounds Coffee**

**00:02 Tom:** This is Tea with Tom, or T as my sister calls me.

[music]

**00:22 Tom:** Welcome to Tea with Tom. And the tea is just finished. [laughter]

**00:28 Pastor Bill:** It's ready.

**00:28 Tom:** Yeah, it's ready. So we'll hit the button. But I'm here in Crestline, California. It's one of California's, Southern California's mountain communities. It snowed last night, which down in the valley for us would really be a novelty. And I'm here at Higher Grounds Coffee shop. And with me is the manager, Alicia. And I've known her since before the place opened. But really, the man behind this shop is Pastor Bill, across the table. And it's his church that has sponsored this shop and really has made it a hub of the community. And so we wanna talk about all that stuff today. Anyway, welcome.

**01:10 PASTOR BILL:** Thank you.

**01:11 Tom:** And it just so happens we have some tea.

**01:14 PASTOR BILL:** Tea?

**01:15 Tom:** Imagine that. [laughter] You guys have been carrying Summit Tea for a while and we are really grateful. We're gonna try...

**01:23 PASTOR BILL:** I think actually since day one.

**01:25 Tom:** Since day one. I like that. We really appreciate you guys as customers. And so I thought, as we talk, we really ought to try some tea. This is just a little bit and if you don't, this is matcha. This is Japanese powdered green tea. See how you like it. It's got that nice fresh... There we go. There it is. Let me start with you, Bill, 'cause this coffee shop is really your vision and particularly the vision of your church. How did this get started?

**02:12 PASTOR BILL:** Well, and it's interesting when you say my vision, but it really started with Alicia as well, almost right from the start. When we started looking at the possibility about 12 years ago, this had already been a coffee shop, and owned by three or four different people that have owned it. And as soon as I moved up here and became pastor of the church, our church is right behind us. The wall of the coffee shop ends and our property begins. There's no separations. It's wall and our property. So I looked at this corner and said, "What a great place. We need to have this corner for the church for ministry purposes." And have talked to the owners over the years. And more recently, the most recent owner got into a place, really got into a negative place with the community and people got all upset about it, and he was ready to sell. And I took it to the church and within a weekend, the board, the leadership said, "Let's put an offer." We put an offer. We took it and then two months later, the church voted on it. The church voted on it unanimously. And that same two-and-a-half month period, with even some help in the community, we raised the money for the 30% down payment.

**03:29 Tom:** No kidding. So you raised the 30% down payment.

**03:30 PASTOR BILL:** Raised 30%. We didn't have it.

**03:32 Tom:** Wow.

[laughter]

**03:33 PASTOR BILL:** Definitely didn't have it.

**03:34 Tom:** Wow. So this was kind of a step of faith.

**03:37 PASTOR BILL:** Big step of faith in many different ways.

**03:40 Tom:** Wow.

**03:41 PASTOR BILL:** Yes. When we said, "Okay, we're gonna try to buy it." We still had to see, will the church say yes. Because that required unanimous. We had to work through all kinds of things with the previous owner and some challenges there. And the building and it... The list went on, right?

**03:58 Tom:** Alicia, how did you figure into the beginning of this?

**04:03 Alicia:** Well, when all of this was going kind of, they were starting to talk about it at the church and I wasn't sure what was going to happen. Bill comes up with really great ideas, and you just never know what's gonna happen or where things are gonna go, especially with all that was on the table and all that could happen. And so I wasn't quite sure what was going to happen, but at that time, my husband and I were working for the church doing the youth group. And so through just talking with Bill, he found out that we were really into coffee and visited coffee shops on our spare time. It was our hobby. We were doing pour-overs at home, loved Augie's. Just found out about our...

**04:50 Tom:** Another good customer.

**04:51 Alicia:** Yes.

**04:51 PASTOR BILL:** Yes.

**04:52 Alicia:** He just found out about our personal love for coffee, and had worked with me in the youth group. And so, just from there started to ask me if I would even be interested in something like that. And at first I was like, "No," because it just was a lot of responsibility and I had never done anything like this. And I wasn't just being asked to be a manager. I was asked to help start this and open it and...

**05:22 Tom:** Figure it out.

**05:22 Alicia:** Figure things out. Yeah, and it seems like a lot. And I didn't think I was capable to do it. And so that was kind of a personal struggle in the very beginning, but then just felt like God was like, "You gotta do it. You gotta push yourself and grow in this way that you've never grown

before." And that sure did happen. [laughter]

**05:43 Tom:** Not without problems, right?

**05:45 Alicia:** Yes. Yeah.

**05:45 Tom:** But here you are today.

**05:47 Alicia:** So then, yeah. We just... We went forward and then, yeah. And here I am. [chuckle]

**05:52 Tom:** Aren't you proud of her?

**05:54 PASTOR BILL:** Oh, very proud of her, her love for coffee, obviously. But more than that, also her love for the Lord, the relationship she had with people, all those things were things that I said, "We need to have relationship here." And we've had the phrase, "community happens here". And we really want community here. And so she demonstrated that already with our youth, besides the fact that we call her mom.

**06:00 Alicia:** The youth group did, yeah.

**06:00 PASTOR BILL:** Because mom was our organizer, right? [laughter]

**06:00 Tom:** I was gonna say you have to be awfully young to think of you in terms of mom, but anyway.

**06:00 Alicia:** The youth group did, yeah. That was pretty funny.

[laughter]

**06:00 PASTOR BILL:** But she was such an organizer that even the other staff looked at her that way. This would be a perfect fit. The coffee love, the love for God, the love for community, and her skills as an organizer.

**06:00 Tom:** Well, here we are. What, two years later?

**06:00 PASTOR BILL:** Two.

**06:00 Tom:** Two years later. And look how you've grown. Look at this shop. I would venture a guess that in some ways it's exceeded your expectations.

**06:00 Alicia:** In many ways, yeah.

**06:56 PASTOR BILL:** It's a lot more than coffee, obviously.

**06:58 Tom:** A lot more.

**07:00 PASTOR BILL:** What we do with tea, what we do with our chai teas or matcha, there's so much that we do here. We bake your own goods.

**07:06 Tom:** That's right, they have that beautiful kitchen/bakery in the back. Most places, they're just crammed into this little tiny space. You guys...

**07:15 Alicia:** Yeah, we have a better space, for sure.

**07:17 Tom:** Yeah. Oh that's great. Well, so two years ago you had a vision to get started with this. One of the things I find that can be under-assessed is the need to be established in a community, particularly if it's a smaller community like this one. So the fact that you've been a pastor of the church right next door, as you were explaining, helps. But on the other hand, this cafe isn't really the church.

**07:45 PASTOR BILL:** Right.

**07:46 Tom:** So how did you guys kinda sort that out? I mean, this isn't a religious establishment, right?

**07:52 PASTOR BILL:** Well, theologically, I could talk about that, but what is the church? There's a whole discussion there. But the church is so much more than a building, right? The church is about people and it is about community, it is about caring, it is about doing things that are gonna meet needs in the community. So yes, there's things that we end up doing here that may be helping people. A lot of people come through here and have meetings here and gatherings, here.

**08:17 Tom:** I saw the Rotary Club has a banner on the outside of the building.

**08:20 PASTOR BILL:** We're getting ready for a big community Thanksgiving dinner. And so that's one of the ways to be a part of the community. You'll notice there's a sign over there for the pregnancy resource center and there's different things like that, here. We've had the supervisor here before her election, when she was elected, then we had candidates forum. We'll just do different things like that. Pete, who was just here the other day, school board. So there was coffee, I think they called it "coffee with the school board" or, "coffee with the board members", something like that. And so, we've had, "coffee with a cop", different things that are just trying...

**08:55 Tom:** Coffee with a cop. There we go.

**08:57 PASTOR BILL:** So, our sheriffs will come and we had several of them, yes.

**09:00 Alicia:** The CHP, everybody shows up. It's actually real fun [chuckle]

**09:02 PASTOR BILL:** Yeah, there were about what, 20 officers here, deputies and officers.

**09:05 Tom:** You guys have done some really creative things, like you invited us to a pop-up event that you were here, so we met the guy that's got the hiking equipment place.

**09:15 Alicia:** Oh yeah, For Gregory.

**09:16 Tom:** Yeah, there's another guy who was selling comic books. There's this big potter, and all that kind of stuff.

**09:22 PASTOR BILL:** The local potter that we have right here.

**09:26 Alicia:** Oh, yeah. I've had most of...

**09:28 Tom:** Oh. Yeah. No, I liked him.

**09:29 Alicia:** There's a lot going on in our town. And I think part of what I really wanted to do was to make sure that we were supporting all the small businesses that are around us. To make sure that we had those partnerships. To make sure that if somebody was having their grand opening, we had coffee there. To make sure that if we were doing a market place... Well, I really wanted to do a lot of market places so that we could have local, not only just small businesses that already have a storefront, but people that are doing it from their home that are hand-making things. There's a lot of people up here, like handmade candles and jewellery and there's just so much up here that people don't even know.

**10:10 PASTOR BILL:** Kinda the best kept secrets.

**10:11 Alicia:** People don't even know how much is on our mountain and I try to keep it as local as possible even with our artists. That's been a really successful way to be a part of our community, to invite the community in to see new artists to support one another. So we have a monthly artist come in, and that's been really fun. And so things like that have been really helpful in reaching out to our community to be a part of it, to show that we care, to show that we want to support one another.

**10:39 Tom:** I think there's a difference between saying that we wanna integrate with the community and then doing it. And you guys not only do it, but you continue to do it. And do it really well. Like you mentioned, the local businesses and all of that. How, in a small community, you fit into that existing structure of leaders and leadership and local businesses and so on, is really important. And I know we had a customer just across town in a grocery store cafe over there. And I know that, I remember Alicia, you telling me about how there was a tea that you chose not to have in this shop, because you didn't wanna compete.

**11:20 Alicia:** Oh yeah, we discussed it.

**11:20 Tom:** Tell me the story about that. I thought it showed a lot of respect for that community.

**11:25 Alicia:** Yeah, so in the beginning we were trying to figure out which teas would be successful here, and we had heard about a group that used to meet here when it was the previous coffee shop, and they were a Jasmine tea group.

**11:38 Tom:** Yeah, I love those guys.

**11:40 Alicia:** It's an older group of people, and they meet every Saturday or something like that. I don't know all the details, but they just sit and talk about the town and all kinds of things. And we really kind of were interested in maybe getting that group back once we re-opened, but then we found out that they were actually meeting at the grocery store that's in town, 'cause they also have the coffee shop/tea whole section.

**12:06 Tom:** Juice and that sort of thing.

**12:07 Alicia:** They have an actual little cafe in there. And so we, from the beginning, were really, with every decision that we make we're very careful about not competing but only promoting community. And so, that wasn't something that we chose to put on our menu because we wanted to make sure that that market, the owner of the market, which Bill is personally really close with, but then also just very...

**12:31 Tom:** Mike right?

**12:32 Alicia:** Yeah, he's very well known in the community, and we just felt really good about, that's something that's going well for them. So we will not be putting that on our menu to try and steal or do anything that could seem just not what our heart is for.

**12:49 Tom:** Yeah, not what your heart is. Yeah, I think that shows respect. Respect goes a long way.

**12:54 PASTOR BILL:** It does.

**12:54 Tom:** Anyway, so fitting into the community is a big part of what you do. And I think that's something undervalued by coffee shops. Sometimes I'll sit down with an owner and they'll say, "You know, I grew up around the corner from this shop and so they've got family, they've got history. And so it's an easy thing for them 'cause they're already there, but a lot of people do come in from the outside. And so how do you position yourself becomes really important. Because you don't wanna step on people's toes 'cause that will affect your business.

**12:54 Alicia:** Yes, it's very different, up here especially. I did not grow up here.

**12:54 Tom:** Bill, you laugh.

**12:54 Alicia:** I did not grow up here, I did not grow up in a small town in general. And it is a completely different system. It is a completely different, just way of living up here and you really have to be extra careful, extra intentional. And I think it taught me a lot of lessons. Just in how anyone should do business, just in how... What it really means to be in a community. And so, yeah, it is quite different up here. You have to make sure that you take everything into account, every small business owner up here in making decisions as far as your business goes, it does affect the entire community, so that's been a very valuable lesson... [chuckle] That I've learned over time, but yeah.

**14:21 Tom:** Nice to have Bill here to kinda take you under his wing, you know, talk about being in the community for a while.

**14:27 Alicia:** Yes, definitely.

**14:29 PASTOR BILL:** Well, and see, this is a small mountain, rural mountain community, and people move out of the big city to get away from the people. Well, where do they move to when they do that? To a small mountain, rural community where they can somewhat hide. Be very individualistic, be very even demanding at times. It's a very unique place. I was joking about it earlier, you have to be careful because up here, people move away where they can get to be alone,

and then they guard it with a gun. And my son, when he was doing the census in the area, actually had to be careful about that. So, it's a unique community. But then LA has its guns, too, right?

[chuckle]

**15:19 Tom:** Well, I suppose so.

**15:20 PASTOR BILL:** But the thing is, with a community like this, you know a lot about people and it's a place where, because it is a small community, you could have a lot of gossip. There's a lot of knowledge of one another. We know the needy that are in our community as well. We know a number of them by name. We'll see them around. We'll greet them by name. And then just like this, the president of the chamber is right across the street from us. And there's all the kinds of relationships that we have. We know the sheriff's deputies and people like that...

**15:56 Tom:** Big network, yeah.

**15:56 PASTOR BILL:** Because we're all part of this community and all of that is about building relationships.

**16:01 Tom:** Yeah, very much so. Well, what word would you say to, let's say, a church, or a not-for-profit, or organization, or community-related organization that is kind of like the people that are the best kept secret. The artisans here in the community that don't have a storefront, and they're looking for a way of serving their community in a broader sense. What would you say about... To consider as far as a coffee shop, or something like it?

**16:35 PASTOR BILL:** Well, for one thing I'd say believe...

**16:39 Tom:** Believe?

**16:39 PASTOR BILL:** But that sounds like a religious term, doesn't it?

**16:42 Tom:** Well, Pastor Bill, I'm not sure that's so foreign an idea, right?

[chuckle]

**16:46 PASTOR BILL:** But believe. Even if you didn't have any kind of religious background, if you believe something, if you believe a dream, if you believe a vision...

**16:54 Tom:** Got your vision, yeah.

**16:55 PASTOR BILL:** And then you go and, don't just make that, "This is my vision, and you all need to come and support it." But instead, you go and you share that vision, you sell that vision, you communicate that vision, you reshape that vision, but believe. Believe you can do it. That's why we went to the church with it, and that's why we took it on, and see it as opportunity. And so it's... You want a word, believe.

**17:25 Tom:** Yeah. Well, so just out of curiosity, is the shop here for profit and the church not-for-profit?



**17:32 PASTOR BILL:** Great question. Church is a non-for-profit, 501 [c] [3], just like any other church is, but the coffee shop is a separate corporation from the church, it is a social purpose corporation.

**17:49 Tom:** Okay, so what...

**17:50 PASTOR BILL:** Which is a unique kind of corporation. You have to design and communicate some type of social purpose that you're going to meet through that, but it's still, it's for profit, so we're paying all the taxes like anybody else is.

**18:04 Tom:** Yeah, right, right.

**18:05 PASTOR BILL:** Which actually has also worked to our benefit for some of what the church is trying to do by being here on this corner, because there's people... "Oh, well you're a church, you're not paying taxes, you're not participating." Oh, no, in fact, in a recent meeting I was, "No, we're paying taxes like everybody else, just like you are." And that helped us have ownership in the community, too, and respect.

**18:30 Tom:** Yeah, exactly. Well, I didn't realize that, that seems like a good idea. So in a sense, part of the risk of this by the church would be that it could go underwater and kind of pull the church down with it. So keeping them separate makes a lot of sense to me, but on the other hand, it gives you a chance to really authentically give back to the community when things cost money and all that sort of thing. Like I was up here one time and your patio, out in back, somebody had brought in tons of sand, and had turned it into a beach, and on a theme related to vacation bible school, which is for kids in the community, right? So what was that about?

**19:17 PASTOR BILL:** We actually did a children's program for a whole week, and it was right out there. And so the people who were decorating put artwork all around, and it was from the stories of the Old Testament, and David, and the children of Israel, and coming across from out of bondage, right? And so the stories were there, and there was a safari theme that went with it. So they put the sand down there, so the kids would be on the sand, and so we had children out there, we did games back there, our music was out there. On our Sunday morning, we do a finale event for our Vacation Bible School, so we invite the parents to come back and all. So that was all out there on a Sunday, too. And then we've done some things like that, but, yeah, there was a good bit of sand we had to clean up.

[laughter]

**19:52 Tom:** Yeah. Well, I thought it was tremendous. I think it showed that just how much effort you're willing to put into what you guys have so articulately called a community and your place in it. Anyway, and it seemed to me kind of like where the profit and the not-for-profit kind of mesh, 'cause I'm sure people bought coffee in the process, I did. [chuckle] And so why can't the two really inter-mesh together while respecting the necessary boundaries between that. Anyway, I thought it was a tremendous idea.

**20:35 PASTOR BILL:** By doing that, we've actually hired Alicia for the church. So Alicia works here as a manager, and she works for the church rather than, technically, the coffee company.

**20:48 Tom:** Oh, really?

**20:48 PASTOR BILL:** So she's our manager working in the coffee company.

**20:52 Tom:** Well, that's interesting. How does that work out for you? Do you notice any difference?

**20:57 Alicia:** Seems to be fine. [laughter]

**20:58 Tom:** Seems to be fine.

**21:00 PASTOR BILL:** When Bill says, "How was prayer today? Did you pray with this?"  
[laughter]

**21:01 Alicia:** Yes. Yeah. It was just a different expectation and responsibility.

**21:07 Tom:** Can I fill this, Bill?

**21:07 PASTOR BILL:** Oh yes, please.

**21:08 Tom:** So we just had some Matcha. Yep, and now Chamomile Spice. Oh yeah. So...

**21:15 PASTOR BILL:** Thank you.

**21:15 Tom:** I'm not leaving Alicia out of this. She's just saying she...

**21:20 Alicia:** It's not my favorite. [chuckle]

**21:22 Tom:** She's been drinking coffee all day so...

**21:25 Alicia:** Yes. Yeah.

**21:25 Tom:** We don't wanna make things worse.

**21:27 PASTOR BILL:** Mm, just the smell. [chuckle]

**21:30 Tom:** Yeah, it's good, it's good. This is a great fall-time and winter tea, for some places. So now it didn't really fly here which was, I thought, interesting.

**21:39 Alicia:** Which is surprising because we're, you know, it's cold up here. We introduced it in the fall too, so it seemed cozy, it seemed, you know, fall flavours, but yeah I don't know.

**21:51 Tom:** Well, this is kinda part of why as Summit Tea Company, we kind of realized that it's almost impossible to guess the exact tastes of your community.

**22:05 Alicia:** Yeah.

**22:05 Tom:** And so we need to start at a general point, and then we need to kind of refine and tweak

it, and find out what really works. So we've been doing that for about two years up here now. So yeah, tell me about the... You have a selection behind the bar, that's kind of a result of that process. So how's that worked out?

**22:23 Alicia:** It's worked out pretty fine actually. We have Earl Grey, Chai, your Green Mountain Thunder, Peppermint and then Blueberry. And those are all teas that can be served hot, and then we cold brew only a few of those. We do Blueberry, Tropical Black, which, Tropical Black, we don't always offer as a hot tea. That one also didn't go so well being served hot, but once we cold brewed it and served it for iced tea, it was very successful. We also do the Green Tea and then we introduced Peach. So we have four teas that we cold brew, steep for anywhere from 24 to 48 hours depending on how strong we want it to be, and we bottle it, and then we serve it over ice. And those have been, even during the winter, we get people coming in...

**23:19 Tom:** People drink iced tea year round, yeah.

**23:21 Alicia:** Specifically for how we serve our tea and so...

**23:24 Tom:** Well, I mean, I told you the story about Patty and I when we came up here, and we just like to stop in and see how things are going, and nothing like doing a little spot check. No pressure. And we got one of your cold steeped teas. Patty got the Green Mountain Thunder, and we both tasted that, and it just absolutely blew our minds. And here we are, the tea people, not unfamiliar with Green Mountain Thunder.

**23:49 Alicia:** Yeah.

**23:50 Tom:** That... And what we deduced is that it's the water. The thing about the mountain community, is that at least part, Bill was explaining earlier, part of your water supply, particularly on this side of town, comes from wells.

**24:02 Alicia:** Yep.

**24:03 Tom:** So this is well water that's coming down. Now it is filtered, right? I mean it goes through the city process.

**24:08 PASTOR BILL:** Filtered through the earth. [chuckle] Natural filter.

**24:11 Tom:** Now we're talking. Yeah! So anyway, your...

**24:14 Alicia:** No, it is very good. Yeah.

**24:16 Tom:** Your... Commercial time, by the way, your cold-brewed Green Mountain Thunder here is the best I have ever had it anywhere.

**24:25 Alicia:** Wow. [laughter]

**24:26 PASTOR BILL:** Good job!

**24:28 Tom:** Yeah, so I mean that's worth the drive to Crestline just to get...

**24:32 Alicia:** It's very refreshing, it's very well-balanced. Yeah... Yes. It's good. [chuckle]

**24:38 Tom:** Yeah so, you know, you've got the water going for you.

**24:40 Alicia:** Yeah.

**24:42 Tom:** Which is a great thing. Well, let's see, so one of the things I'm curious about, too, is the culture of your coffee shop. So any organization has a culture and kind of creates one usually through the personalities of the people, input of the community, and other factors, right? So how would you describe your culture? What you're trying to accomplish here among the employees, and kind of what you project?

**25:11 Alicia:** I would say, very kind [chuckle] and very positive culture. Has been something that, from the start, we have really wanted to cultivate here. So with hiring our staff, we go through a pretty good process with each one of them. We just... We want them to be set apart. We really don't just need another barista, or another cook, or another dishwasher. We really need people who care about being here, we really need people who care about the person on the other side of the bar that they're serving each day. And that each person we hire has a true servant's heart and can handle when a negative customer comes in, but not just with good customer service, but with a caring heart, knowing that that's another person struggling this day. And yeah, it's not fun to be given attitude, or to take the brunt of somebody's bad day. But, that is kind of...

**26:13 Tom:** That's when your culture shines.

**26:15 Alicia:** Yeah, that is part of being a part of the community is, you walk through that with. And these are people that we see every single day. And so we do really have true regulars here. We do have people that come in every single day to support us, and they're not always nice. [laughter] Even the ones that come in everyday and still support us. And so we as a staff, we as a team, really need to make sure that we're good on our end so that we can take care of everyone who comes in, and so that we can be there for one another. We've had staff members pray with people from the community, who have, seriously, would just walk in and you can tell that something's wrong and you...

**26:53 Tom:** They're carrying something, yeah.

**26:53 Alicia:** Genuinely ask, "How are you doing? Is everything okay?". And we've had one staff member do that with the customer, and the second she started talking about what was happening, she broke down in tears. And our staff member walked around the bar, hugged her, and then prayed with her because, you know, we wanna be different. But not only that, every person that we hire, that's just kind of a part of their personality, and a part of their heart also. And so that has definitely helped our culture. Be kind, I think that's really important, to be kind. There's this one customer who comes in all the time, he's very grumpy, not having a good day, really any day, and we've just continued to be fine. And now he'll have full on conversations with us. And I actually saw him laugh the other day.

**27:54 Tom:** Oh, you're winning him over.

**27:55 Alicia:** And I was like, "This is what it's about."

**27:57 Tom:** There we go.

**27:57 Alicia:** This is really what it's about, not just get them a good cup of coffee or a good tea or a good pastry. That stuff is very important, to have a quality product, but there has to be more than that, there has to be more than just serving the product, there needs to be something to back that up.

**28:18 PASTOR BILL:** We actually said, though, when we started this and it's our mission to show, and it's theological again, but it's to show people the love of Christ through great coffee, through great tea, through great products and through a place where they can experience community.

**28:32 Tom:** Wow. Well, bravo. I'm really proud of you guys. What you're doing here is not easy to do, and I think you've really taken a hold and you're consistent. I really see that the fact that there's a church behind this building, not just physically, but organizationally, the fact that the values of that come through and create a culture here, I think it's really awesome.

**28:57 PASTOR BILL:** See that in our staff too. Because they care about each other and I think it starts there, too. Because if they didn't care about each other, then they're not gonna do a very good job caring for that person who walks through the door. So when you talk about culture, it begins here, begins with us, begins with what the staff does.

**29:17 Alicia:** Yeah. And something that I think is really important when you are leading a team, or when you are a part of a team, just knowing that you're human and sometimes, and I'm talking about me personally, sometimes that gets stagnant also and realizing that if you're having a hard time in your life or whatever as a leader, it is going to affect your team and there's gonna be a moral shifts. And so, something that's super important in a team is being willing to own up to those things, and to then do a culture change.

**29:56 Tom:** Not be the perfect person.

**30:00 Alicia:** Yeah, and to be ready to address things even if it's within the team, but especially when it's in yourself, knowing that you're gonna struggle sometimes and you're going to have a hard time leading others. And that's something that I've had to learn. Each season that we go into, there's different struggles and there are different things that come up and so it's really good to own up to that within your team, build that trust, work on those things. And that will immediately, not immediately, sorry, that will eventually start to trickle down.

**30:37 Tom:** Overtime, it will pay off.

**30:38 Alicia:** And that will change that culture. So, if you are having a culture issue within your team, you have to check yourself first and work on those things, address those things, have a good team meeting where you talk through everything and say, "Alright, now we're gonna be different, we're gonna walk through this differently and we're gonna be better all together." That will really help.

**31:02 PASTOR BILL:** Now, do you say why I hired her as manager?

**31:04 Tom:** Yeah, yeah [chuckle] I get that.

**31:06 Alicia:** That didn't come right away.

[laughter]

**31:07 Tom:** The fact is that many coffee shops, not just coffee shops, but many coffee shops have trouble attracting people who have that servant's heart.

**31:19 PASTOR BILL:** Right.

**31:20 Tom:** They have a hard time retaining those people and it's because the work just becomes work, and it's like, "Am I really being paid enough to deal with the grumpy person every day?" And so it becomes a transaction. "I work for money and my own happiness, right?" What happens when there's a problem in there? And so, they go somewhere else. But people sometimes use the word family, but that can mean different things too. But I like the idea of the team, of the other way you're describing it. That's the kind of team people wanna be part of, really. They wanna be known, they wanna be able to be themselves, and to be so in a way where other people accept them in the ups and downs, right? That's a good place to be. That's one of the pictures of the church, isn't it?

**32:06 PASTOR BILL:** It sure enough is.

**32:06 Tom:** I got it, how did that happen?

**32:09 PASTOR BILL:** I think it's interesting when you think, go back to when they used to have the bar, that place where people will know my name.

**32:15 Tom:** Yeah, that's right.

**32:15 PASTOR BILL:** I'm forgetting what the program was.

**32:18 Alicia:** Cheers, yeah.

**32:18 PASTOR BILL:** Cheers, right?

**32:18 Tom:** Still popular today.

**32:19 PASTOR BILL:** It's still popular. Isn't that what a coffee shop can be too?

**32:23 Tom:** Can be, yeah.

**32:25 PASTOR BILL:** A place where people come and people know your name. And that's probably part of the environment that we try to have here.

**32:31 Tom:** Right. Okay, well, let me change direction here a little bit, 'cause I know some people that watch this are kind of asking the question, "Well, how do I get started? It's great hear now that you're running and things are going well, but how to get started?" Bill, you mentioned that you guys raised your 30% percent down-payment from the community. So can you kind of unpack that for

us? How did you do it? What did you say?

**33:00 PASTOR BILL:** Well, there were, again, it helped that there was relationship already taking place in the community.

**33:04 Tom:** Yeah, you are a part of the community already.

**33:05 PASTOR BILL:** So, because we're part of the community, and the community heard about this corner and what had happened here and there was a lot of negative going on about the corner. It was about to become a cannabis location and that became a problem and there were a lot of issues. So with that, there were enough people that were negative, that when the church stepped in to buy the property, the community reacted with excitement, exhilaration. Literally with coming and saying, "Thank you."

**33:33 Tom:** This is an upgrade.

**33:38 PASTOR BILL:** There was so much appreciation that the local newspaper said, "I wanna put a thermometer in the newspaper for you." So they put a thermometer in the paper.

**33:46 Tom:** For your fund-raising?

**33:47 PASTOR BILL:** For the fund-raising. Now 95% of what we raised, maybe even more, was all inside the church, but it's still...

**33:54 Tom:** But they are part of the community, too, right?

**33:57 PASTOR BILL:** I had people walk up to me and hand my a \$100. "Here this is to help, for the coffee shop."

**34:02 Alicia:** People were slipping checks in envelopes through the crack of the church door.

**34:07 PASTOR BILL:** Of the church door. [chuckle]

**34:08 Alicia:** So there'd be envelopes on the floor when he would come in to church.

**34:12 PASTOR BILL:** Yes, yes.

**34:13 Tom:** Wow.

**34:13 PASTOR BILL:** And there was a few people that did it online so it was... The big thing was starting with the church, the church for us, the church had to have that sense of, we're in this or we're not in it.

**34:23 Alicia:** Or else, there would be already...

**34:26 PASTOR BILL:** Oh my.

**34:27 Alicia:** What's the word? Separation, yeah.

**34:31 PASTOR BILL:** Division and conflict.

**34:33 Alicia:** Division, that was the word I was looking for, division. And that would already...

**34:37 PASTOR BILL:** Are you gonna have some more of that chamomile?

**34:39 Tom:** Well no, but I was gonna offer you. Mine got cold so... This is a tea board, so it has holes...

**34:44 PASTOR BILL:** Oh good, okay, so you can discard it.

**34:46 Tom:** And a tray underneath it, so you just pour the tea out on the board and it goes through the holes.

**34:49 Alicia:** Wow.

**34:49 Tom:** So it's actually very, very polite to do that.

**34:52 Alicia:** He wants it.

**34:53 PASTOR BILL:** Oh yes, that chamomile spice.

**34:56 Tom:** So it's not quite as piping hot, but how bout that?

**35:00 Alicia:** I wanna try this one.

**35:01 Tom:** Wanna try this one? You wanna hold your cup over the board? I'm afraid I'm gonna drip a little bit here.

**35:06 Alicia:** Let's just do that then.

**35:07 Tom:** I keep giving my carafes away so...

**35:09 Alicia:** Oh, that's okay, that's perfect.

[chuckle]

**35:14 PASTOR BILL:** We had to communicate with the church.

**35:15 Tom:** So anyway, cheers.

**35:16 PASTOR BILL:** Thank you.

**35:17 Tom:** Well done, Higher Grounds team.

**35:20 PASTOR BILL:** Thank you. We had to communicate with the church and the church then, once the church felt like they were in, then you had to say, okay, then we need to raise this money



and that will be another step. That's one of the ways, for us, that you see, okay, is God in this or not?

**35:37 Tom:** Yeah.

**35:38 PASTOR BILL:** And it was amazing how because we had... What was it? Three months? Less than three months, 'cause yeah, we started a 90-day escrow, and we started the escrow, or we actually did the offer before we had approval from the church.

**35:50 Tom:** Well, there we go.

**35:53 PASTOR BILL:** So, but the board, the board met, board talked about it, board prayed about it. Board voted unanimously to do it, when in previous times there had been opportunities to buy this and it had been a unanimous no.

**36:04 Tom:** Oh, okay.

**36:07 PASTOR BILL:** There were times before this ever even became a coffee shop, before anything was done on this property, there was opportunity to buy it, the board voted no. So over the years there's been no votes. And we went... And even since I've been here 12 years ago, we had a conversation early on about the possibility and it was a no vote. But this time...

**36:27 Tom:** Wow. So you have a sense of God's timing with all this.

**36:31 PASTOR BILL:** Very much so.

**36:32 Tom:** Not just simply taking advantage of a vacant property.

**36:37 PASTOR BILL:** No, it was very much unique timing and seeing that as the right time to do it.

**36:41 Tom:** Okay. So you went down and took out a loan for the remaining 70%. So that loan is in the name of the...

**36:48 PASTOR BILL:** Crestline First Baptist Church.

**36:50 Tom:** Oh, the church took out the loan?

**36:52 PASTOR BILL:** Church took out the loan and the loan is on the church property actually.

**36:56 Tom:** Oh I see. Okay.

**36:57 PASTOR BILL:** I think this is a part of a collateral. We used this and one other piece, 'cause we have a parsonage. And so there's a couple of pieces that were used for the collateral.

**37:06 Tom:** I see, Okay. Yeah, that makes sense, okay.

**37:08 PASTOR BILL:** 'Cause you don't know what the corner is going to do.

**37:11 Tom:** Right.

**37:12 PASTOR BILL:** But again, it keeps it tied to the church.

**37:15 Tom:** Yeah, that's right, but independent too.

**37:17 PASTOR BILL:** Mm-hmm.

**37:18 Tom:** Yeah. I like the situations where people kind of figure out how to walk that line in an authentic sort of way, like you guys are doing. So, would you comment any further about how that worked that might be instructive? Let's say there's another church or another pastor out there thinking, "Doggone it, we need to do this."

[chuckle]

**37:40 PASTOR BILL:** Well, pastors surely have a fair understanding of how to raise money in their own church and to do some type of a capital campaign, something that's gonna put a vision out before... 'cause that's what we did.

**37:53 Tom:** Right, it's not a foreign idea for a church, right?

**37:56 PASTOR BILL:** We put the vision out there... Exactly. And said, "Here's our vision. Here's what we believe God's calling us to do. Here's what it's going to take, the finances to do that is God." And then, on this one, we didn't have any kind of a fund raiser come in. We didn't hire a professional which sometimes, people would say is not wise.

**38:14 Tom:** Some sometimes do.

**38:15 PASTOR BILL:** But we felt like this was something that... Let's take to the church, let's see. And the way God brought the money together was just special.

**38:23 Tom:** I love the little pile of envelopes stuffed through the crack in the door.

**38:27 PASTOR BILL:** There was.

**38:28 Alicia:** Yeah, it was like every week.

**38:29 Tom:** That works all day. Okay, so you had your money, okay. So then you need to...

**38:36 PASTOR BILL:** So you gotta look for resources, obviously within your church and like this. And we actually went to our own, our Christian Credit Union. But we actually found, again because of local connections, there is a local bank that we were able to get a better rate from.

[chuckle]

**38:53 PASTOR BILL:** And in fact, that accepted us and our credit better. We had no loans, no debt on our property.

**39:00 Tom:** Okay.

**39:01 PASTOR BILL:** So we were really in a positive position but we were accepted better at a financial institution that was secular institution.

**39:08 Tom:** Sure. Oh yeah, well, credit unions and banks kind of have a different set of rules.

**39:11 PASTOR BILL:** Mm-Hmm.

**39:12 Tom:** I can see that.

**39:13 PASTOR BILL:** Yeah.

**39:14 Tom:** Well that's cool how that worked out. So you financed it here locally?

**39:17 PASTOR BILL:** Mm-hmm.

**39:18 Tom:** Okay, that makes a difference too, I would think. As opposed to going online or looking for something like that.

**39:23 PASTOR BILL:** Right. This was somebody that knew the community, which helped. The bank at the time was even talking about putting possibly a teller out here, so...

**39:31 Tom:** Oh.

**39:32 PASTOR BILL:** It was just something again, it was part of that timing. Or what I call Kairos timing.

**39:41 Tom:** Yeah.

**39:41 PASTOR BILL:** Timing that said, "Okay, this was all gonna come together, if it was right."

**39:44 Tom:** Right. And it certainly has and has been.

**39:47 PASTOR BILL:** Same thing also at that time, we connected with Stevie from Arcade Coffee Roasters in Riverside.

**39:53 Tom:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

**39:53 PASTOR BILL:** Stevie was a really... Wouldn't you say a great resource for us?

**39:56 Alicia:** Absolutely.

**39:58 PASTOR BILL:** He gave training to our staff, he really helped us redo our equipment in here because we really needed to change pretty much everything in here.

**39:58 Tom:** Needed to do some upgrades and that sort of thing.

**39:58 Alicia:** Yeah.

**39:58 PASTOR BILL:** So he helped us actually purchase equipment, find what would be best for us and so... And we tried different roasters before we made our selection.

**39:58 Tom:** Right, right.

**39:58 PASTOR BILL:** But we were looking at somebody that would give us that local support, not just sell us coffee beans.

**39:58 Tom:** Yeah, and the holistic support with the machinery and so on. Is there a maintenance contract that comes with it? Or is the maintenance bill yours?

**39:58 PASTOR BILL:** Yes, it's called "Pastor Bill."

**40:33 Tom:** Pastor Bill and a pipe cleaner, right?

**40:33 Alicia:** Yes, but as far as the espresso machine and their grinders and stuff, they do have a mechanic that will come up specifically for us to help us.

**40:42 Tom:** Okay, you just have to let them know.

**40:44 Alicia:** Yeah.

**40:44 Tom:** That's... Okay.

**40:45 PASTOR BILL:** For the espresso machine.

**40:46 Alicia:** Every question that I have, I shoot one of their team members a question or I shoot them a text. They've been available for us, I mean, since we started, since we opened.

**40:56 Tom:** That's great.

**40:57 Alicia:** They are our sole provider of coffee right now and so...

**41:00 Tom:** Well, they've earned that spot.

**41:01 Alicia:** Yeah, they've been really awesome.

**41:02 Tom:** Okay, so...

**41:03 PASTOR BILL:** They helped us purchase our espresso machine, actually get it at a good price and other equipment that we have in here.

**41:10 Tom:** So that can be very expensive. It can be like buying a car, right? So did you... Was it a cash purchase, did they give you terms or contract?

**41:21 PASTOR BILL:** In this case we did a cash purchase. As we raised our funds that was one of

the things that we felt like we needed to put the cash into right from the start. If you're gonna have a coffee shop, you better have a good espresso machine.

**41:35 Tom:** Something that's gonna last, yeah that's right.

**41:37 PASTOR BILL:** And then some of the other equipment, our grinders and some of other coffee...

**41:41 Alicia:** So those ones they found used, the grinders. The espresso machine...

**41:46 Tom:** Oh, they found them?

**41:47 PASTOR BILL:** We got these through Arcade.

**41:47 Alicia:** They did all our research for us.

**41:50 PASTOR BILL:** Stevie gets it.

**41:51 Alicia:** They did all the research and...

**41:51 Tom:** So they have an eye out for quality used equipment or maybe in other places, upgrading and so on.

**41:56 Alicia:** Yeah, they had connections and just people that they're able to order things straight from and... Yeah, they were very resourceful.

**42:05 Tom:** Gee, that's good. So getting those things lined up at the beginning, tea, I mean, well you need hot water.

**42:10 PASTOR BILL:** Well, it's really about lining up with people if you think about it. So there were people locally, like the local owner, general manager of the grocery store, my friend Mike. There were people like Stevie from Arcade. There was the bank manager, the owner that we met. Frankly, what you did for us, okay, Tom. To have people that we could meet with and learn from and could give us their wisdom and all. That's why... And we were looking for something more than just, "Okay, let's just get coffee, let's just get tea, whatever we can buy." Let's do something that's gonna make a difference somewhere else too. Where we know something about the growers. Where we're doing something that's value added, that was another theme behind what we were doing. So connecting with people like you really helped us do that. And if you don't remember...

**43:02 Tom:** Gosh, you're gonna make me blush on my own video here.

**43:04 PASTOR BILL:** Well, you even helped us connect with some other people too. You even did an event for us where we connected with other roasters and coffee brewers and coffee shops, and so things like that that are just the networking, it is so good. Which is locally, but then like what you did for us, even broadening that. So all that and really made a difference for us.

**43:24 Tom:** Cool, well that's gratifying to hear.

**43:26 PASTOR BILL:** Good.

**43:26 Tom:** Yeah, so really we would say a good word then, probably, to someone looking to start up, is that you really do have to have those strategic relationships.

**43:35 Alicia:** To have support.

**43:37 Tom:** Yeah, so it's not enough just to have people to wish you well.

**43:40 PASTOR BILL:** Yes.

**43:41 Tom:** Right, but people who will... Who are like benevolent supporters, who want you to win.

**43:50 PASTOR BILL:** Yes, yes.

**43:50 Alicia:** Oh, yeah.

**43:50 Tom:** And who'll help provide for that, that's great. So I...

**43:53 Alicia:** Well, yeah, to be honest, we didn't fully know what we were doing in the beginning, I mean, like obviously...

**43:58 PASTOR BILL:** We didn't know what we were doing. [chuckle]

**43:58 Alicia:** I think with every step that we took, it was because somebody was helping lead us along the way. It was like, okay, in my head I was like, "Well, first thing I should do is get a roaster, a good roster," and then from there, we got our machines and then from there oh tea, and then from there it was just like, because people were coming alongside us and willing to walk through it with us we're here today, you know. And I think that's absolutely necessary, is to surround yourself with people who are willing to teach you what they learned, willing to walk through with you what they walked through, some people on their own, and those are some of the people that are more willing to walk through that stuff with you.

**44:43 Tom:** Yeah. Is not true.

**44:43 Alicia:** 'cause they don't want you to go through that.

**44:45 Tom:** Yeah, save you trouble.

**44:45 Alicia:** Arcade is one great example as they just started in a little warehouse box roasting coffee and then kind of not really supposed to be selling coffee. And then from there, they grew so much but they learned so much on their own and now that's why they're so willing to come alongside every wholesale account they have. It's not just another wholesale account, it's somebody, "Oh, let's make sure you're successful." Just like you did for us was really great.

**45:15 PASTOR BILL:** We're really willing to listen and learn, we really are. So what we did with Arcade, just today I went to Rosebud Coffee in Pasadena and like the event we were...

**45:27 Tom:** They're in a church too, right? A church cafe.

**45:29 PASTOR BILL:** They're run by a church too and just to keep listening and learning and I think that's true with any kind of a business, listen to others around you. Be humble enough to learn.

**45:41 Tom:** Absolutely, I think that's a really important word, Bill, is humble. I think some people are just dyed in the wool do-it-yourselfers. So they feel like they have to know everything, they have to know all the details and all of this, and there is a side to that, right, that's important, but on the other hand, you can't know everything. You're not gonna, without a great deal of time and parallel tracks, know what your coffee roaster knows. And so, those relationships going forward, just absolutely pivotal, that makes... That's kind of your greater team, really.

**46:19 PASTOR BILL:** They are.

**46:20 Tom:** Yeah, well, awesome. Well, let me look at my notes and make sure we got this thing pretty much covered. Oh, yes, everybody likes to hear war stories. So what were some of the big hairy obstacles and problems that you encountered?

**46:36 PASTOR BILL:** Are? [laughter]

**46:36 Tom:** Are, yeah, that will work too.

**46:39 Alicia:** Every day there's something.

**46:41 Tom:** Now that seems a really interesting bit.

**46:42 PASTOR BILL:** Well, was it this morning? The cream that was...

**46:45 Alicia:** Oh yeah, we just got a big order of half-and-half from restaurant, I'm not gonna say it.

**46:49 Tom:** Go there, yeah.

**46:51 Alicia:** No, a restaurant supplies store, [chuckle] and it was all bad. And the date is for January.

**46:56 PASTOR BILL:** Two boxes!

**46:56 Tom:** Dang!

**47:00 PASTOR BILL:** And we just bought it on Tuesday.

**47:00 Alicia:** So that's just kind of unfortunate, and it's just something you have to figure out like, "Hey Bill, like we've gotta return this and get our money back, 'cause that's not our fault." We stored it all at the correct temperature, did all the right things, and then we gotta run to our local good ones and get half-and-half, which they have saved our lives so many times.

**47:17 Tom:** Good for them.

**47:18 Alicia:** So yeah.

**47:19 PASTOR BILL:** And we have to run off the mountain real fast to get it before other things.

**47:21 Alicia:** Yeah, so there's just, there's always something, but...

**47:26 PASTOR BILL:** You know, there's been so many things, when we first started out every piece of refrigeration unit in here was broken, after we started. Before we even really knew it, right? We'd started, we had to come in and got some things just cleaned up and all, but then every piece was broken.

**47:44 Alicia:** It was right before summer.

**47:45 PASTOR BILL:** Every piece.

**47:45 Alicia:** It was right before our first summer.

**47:47 PASTOR BILL:** Yes.

**47:47 Alicia:** Everything started to kinda fail.

**47:49 PASTOR BILL:** Everything needed work, when I say the refrigerator, the freezer, the ice maker, the cooler unit right here, there wasn't one...

**47:57 Tom:** Nice to inherit these things but...

**48:01 PASTOR BILL:** These were all the things we bought, when we bought the building which should have...

**48:05 Alicia:** Should have been working.

**48:06 Tom:** In a perfect world.

**48:08 PASTOR BILL:** And the list goes on. The kinds of facility issues that are around here, that are the roof leaking and whatever else, there's lots of things like that. And then we're trying to deal with the county to try to see if there's a way to expand because if you can see on the camera, we're in the biggest section of our seating area. We only have room here for 13 chairs during the winter, inside. Now summer time it's great. We've got patios and picnic tables and I got umbrellas out there, we gotta stage out there in the blue sky. But the winter time, it's a little harder. Like when it was snowing yesterday morning and then raining after that. And so we really wanna expand this, but that has its own challenges that go with that.

**48:56 Tom:** Well, in the right time.

**48:58 PASTOR BILL:** In the right time.

**49:00 Tom:** Yeah. Okay, well, good. I wanna thank you guys for the interview. It's awesome and Tea with Tom is really actually about you guys more than it is about Summit. Thank you for your



kind words. Our ambition is to do our part in contributing to your success and it's exciting to come and share in that a little bit with you. So thanks a lot, Alicia. Thank you, Pastor Bill.

**49:23 PASTOR BILL:** You're welcome, Tom. Thank you.

**49:24 Alicia:** Thank you for having us.

**49:25 Tom:** Yeah, you bet.

**49:26 PASTOR BILL:** Thank you for your support.

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