

The man with the double life

I see him every four or five weeks. Took a while to find him. I had the same barber for 35 years, then the headhunters came after my wife and we wound up in Dallas.

The first Texas barber I tried put me through an assembly line of hair washers, hair rinsers, hair cutters, hair trimmers and hair blowers, then turned me loose. Never went back. The next guy did fine, but retired after six months. The third one took the entire 35 minutes we spent together complaining about her boss.

So when I finally found Marv I latched onto him . . .

He's been cutting hair for more than 40 years and some of his clients have been with him from the beginning. Marv's full of stories and we carefully steer clear of politics. I've been seeing him now for about four years, but it wasn't until a few months ago that I discovered his double life.

We were trying to schedule my next appointment and I suggested a specific date.

"Nope, can't do that," he said, shaking his head.

"Vacation?"

"Nooooo . . . I've got a trial."

"A what?"

"A trial."

Turns out my barber is a jury consultant for one of the best-known defense attorneys in Dallas. Marv had been cutting his hair for about 35 years when the attorney suddenly asked him, "Marv, you're a pretty good judge of people, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?"

“Well, you spend all your time talking with one person after another and you’ve been doing it forever. I’ll bet you size people up pretty quickly, don’t you? Bet a lot of your first impressions turn out to be pretty accurate, don’t they?”

“Well, yeah, that’s true,” admitted Marv.

“So how’d you like to do some work for me?”

“What kind of work could I *possibly* do for you?”

The attorney explained, and Marv’s been helping him select jury members for the past few years whenever one of the attorney’s cases actually goes to court.

When I told my wife my barber was also a jury consultant she hooted. “That’s *great!*” she laughed. “What a *perfect* fit.”

And it is, when you think about it. Barbers – and barkeeps – listen to their customers for hours every day . . . and the customers pour out all kinds of confessions. Who better to help lawyers pick juries? They’ve heard it all before, again and again.

Well, people who run social enterprises usually aren’t lawyers – but they *do* need professional advice. The trick is finding the right kind. I’m not talking about hiring consultants. Everybody knows it’s easy to become a consultant: You just start telling people, “I’m a consultant.” I know. I used to be one. Now I tell people “I’m a coach.” Don’t think it’s working out, though . . .

No, if you’re in the early stages of business planning, I suggest you create a kitchen cabinet as soon as possible. Find three or four people with the kinds of expertise you need. Advisors you can trust. People who will keep what you say confidential. Take them all to breakfast once a month . . . or if that isn’t workable, buy lunch for one of them each week. Lay everything out for them, don’t hold anything back. You may be surprised how many are willing to help – especially veteran entrepreneurs.

I give the same advice to people who’ve been running social enterprises for years, because there are so many decisions they have to make alone, the kinds of things CEOs are hired to deal with -- so many times when it’s premature to consult their staff or Board members.

Being a CEO is a terribly lonely job. I’ve had dozens of them over the decades tell me they didn’t have anybody they could use as a sounding board, nobody they could trust with their problems, fears and anxieties. That’s why so many CEO clubs spring up – the members need a peer group.

But if you're a CEO and can't find or don't want to join a peer group, why not create a kitchen cabinet of your own? Find those three or four people you can trust and put all your cards on the table. Let them help you play the hands you've been dealt. Don't try to go it alone. It's tough enough out there without trying to be a one-man card shark. Sure, you ultimately have to be the one who decides whether to hold 'em or fold 'em – but before you do, get some help.

Marv's available . . .