

Audio file

[Interview with Anand Cedar River Mar 13.m4a](#)

Transcript

00:00:00 Anand

Food was the food seen in general was never my never on my radar in this way at all 10 years ago.

00:00:10 John

Hmm.

00:00:10 Anand

It was something that was a I enjoyed and it.

00:00:14 Anand

Was.

00:00:14 Anand

Discovered it was a passion of mine and my wife and I. We you know, we could.

00:00:22 Anand

We don't really consider ourselves foodies, but we I guess we are.

00:00:25 Anand

We go explore new stuff and go try new stuff and that was always our thing.

00:00:31 Anand

And between my wife and I, my my middle brother, he was he actually became a food Blogger.

00:00:38 Anand

And uh.

00:00:40 Anand

Him and I got together and we started a catering slash pop up business where we were.

00:00:47 Anand

Doing food from PG from Fiji.

00:00:52 Anand

And nobody does Fijian food here.

00:00:54 Anand

So we started to share a little bit about our culture because figure, what better way to share a little bit of Fiji and and educate people with Fijian Buddhist.

00:01:06 Anand

By just sharing what we do at home.

00:01:09 Anand

So we.

00:01:11 Anand

Really just did one pop up as a as.

00:01:14 Anand

A.

00:01:14 Anand

Trial to see if it would work. It was the 6th course set menu with 30 seats and we sold the receipt and.

00:01:25 Anand

Everything went as smoothly, surprisingly smooth as possible, and so that kind of lit the fire.

00:01:32 Anand

And got us intrigued and kind of developing that business further.

00:01:38 Anand

So we got that going and started doing farmers markets and stuff like that.

00:01:42 Anand

And of course, COVID hit and everything got scaled back and we were.

00:01:49 Anand

Kind of struggling to figure out which direction to go or if we need to shut it down.

00:01:55 Anand

But we're realizing that, you know, you just have to be a little bit creative to kind of piece it together until it all blew over.

00:02:04 Anand

And there were other similar mindset. People out there. Breweries and other places that would allow us to operate with them to kind of join forces and and kind of make it through.

00:02:19 Anand

While we were doing that, we developed enough skills and enough of the menu to.

00:02:27 Anand

UM.

00:02:29 Anand

Start.

00:02:31 Anand

Exploring a brick and mortar for that place. The the brand at that time.

00:02:36 Anand

Is it was called Tolo TOLU.

00:02:39 Anand

Started looking at brick and mortar space.

00:02:43 Anand

And because it's such a foreign concept, and in the middle of COVID it's too risky for any landlord to to want to.

00:02:52 Anand

Take on.

00:02:54 Anand

So then the next question was OK.

00:02:58 Anand

What do we need to do? Because we we don't have a ton of experience behind this.

00:03:05 Anand

So we needed to pad our resume a bit more.

00:03:10 Anand

And.

00:03:11 Anand

I have a mentor and she's this amazing lady that has.

00:03:19 Anand

She's the person I want to be someday. She's she's got multiple businesses, real estate. She just opened one of her shops in.

00:03:27 Anand

Vegas.

00:03:29 Anand

Let alone everything here in Washington. So she's just on a different level that I can't wrap my head around even today. So.

00:03:37 Anand

Went under her wing and.

00:03:40 Anand

She connected us with the previous owner of Cedar River.

00:03:44 Anand

And those are all off market.

00:03:47 Anand

And he he wanted out because it wasn't something he was passionate about. It's just something he ended up taking up.

00:03:55 Anand

And so we started kind of researching the business a bit. It's Cedar River had been around for or has been around for over 23 years. It's an existing business with an existing clientele.

00:04:08 Anand

Texas Style BBQ, which we had no.

00:04:12 Anand

No experience with personally like we've done stuff here and there.

00:04:17 Anand

But not nothing at this level.

00:04:20 Anand

So really kind of.

00:04:22 Anand

Did a deep dive and and just from the business standpoint the numbers.

00:04:27 Anand

Had plenty of room in it for improvement, which is what cracker does to it and.

00:04:33 Anand

There's a big enough space to potentially share both businesses out of the same space.

00:04:39 Anand

The other total business as well.

00:04:43 Anand

So we took it on knowing that it was going to take some time to kind of get this place dialed in.

00:04:49 Anand

Kind of fix all the issues that we saw up front.

00:04:54 Anand

And and then start driving it towards the vision that we had for that place.

00:05:00 Anand

Which I'd say we're about 90% there now.

00:05:04 Anand

UM.

00:05:07 Anand

It's.

00:05:09 Anand

It's very, very interesting, especially in downtown Renton because it's older clientele.

00:05:17 Anand

Very in color demographic that is now transitioning to younger, more younger groups are moving in.

00:05:26 Anand

And that's.

00:05:28 Anand

Us hoping we're positioning ourselves correctly so we can target that as it's developing.

00:05:34 Anand

With all the natural growth around it and that's happening anyway.

00:05:38 Anand

UM.

00:05:42 Anand

The struggle was as any new ownership of an existing business.

00:05:50 Anand

A lot of pushback from customers, a lot of negative feedback because just the fact that we were there kind of thing.

00:05:59 Anand

And we kind of expected that and expected some losses of customers.

00:06:08 Anand

It's just going to happen. So you kind of knew that was happening, but.

00:06:13 Anand

Didn't hurt any less, so we just we power through all that, you know, and tried to do a gradual slow change instead of very abrupt cut and dry.

00:06:25 Anand

Because we didn't want to lose that clientele either. We wanted to keep making money and this was towards the end of Cobit so.

00:06:33 Anand

We don't want to risk any of that.

00:06:36 Anand

UM.

00:06:39 Anand

It's.

00:06:42 Anand

I think our biggest challenge right now.

00:06:46 Anand

Would be still a lot of visibility issues. I think there's.

00:06:52 Anand

You know, it's at this place, been around over 23 years, there's still a lot of locals that don't know we exist.

00:06:59 Anand

And from what I saw, there's.

00:07:03 Anand

It was 600,000 people in Renton. If I if I looked at the numbers correctly, somewhere around there.

00:07:09 Anand

And so that's that's a pretty big number for us to still be under the radar.

00:07:16 Anand

Now we've established or reestablished social media and our Google SEO and all that has been optimized, so it is getting out in front of a lot more people, but we're still.

00:07:31 Anand

Well, maybe I'm just.

00:07:34 Anand

Helping out happen faster, but we are every day we get new customers that have never been.

00:07:40 Anand

Which is a great sign.

00:07:41 Anand

And uh.

00:07:44 Anand

But you know, I think if there's.

00:07:47 Anand

Any interesting ways we can reach out and get in front of more locals and then expand out from outside? You know, Renton would be even better.

00:07:58 John

Man, that's that's like, such a inspiring story to hear. You know, a lot of businesses dive in real fast. They get in real hot. It, like, escalates real quickly as they, I have an idea and boom, I'm taking the lease and then holy cow, I'm learning all these things like you guys did like the whole pop up scene.

00:08:17 John

You know, tried to get that concept going. Got guidance that's incredible to get guidance and say hey, you need to pad your resume a little bit more or maybe you'll push back from financing or you know just brokers and landlords not wanting to talk to you. That's also really amazing and then find mentorship to say hey like here's the opportunity with the business and.

00:08:37 John

There's a good chance that you can like pad your resume with it, but also take steps towards your overarching concept. While like really learning how to run an actual business, those that all is such an amazing journey.

00:08:50 John

It's really inspiring to hear. I have a couple of questions about kind of your earlier phases. You like went straight into everything we want to know, but like out of a different order. So I'm kind of like, oh, no, like, I gotta ask my questions in a different order now. So let me ask.

00:09:02 John

You about you talking about you?

00:09:03 Amritha

Before you join before anything else, is it OK Anand if we record this interview because you know we will need? OK, alright. Thank you.

00:09:11 Anand

Yes, yes.

00:09:14 John

OK, great. Yeah, I wanted to talk to you about your pop up experience. You know, we do have some hypothesis around popups, but I'd like to hear about like, how did you find out where you could pop up? How did you find other businesses, etc. How did you go about just doing popups to test your idea in the first place?

00:09:35 Anand

So.

00:09:38 Anand

We started making a lot of friends in the industry that were in similar places or had food trucks at least.

00:09:46 Anand

And.

00:09:47 Anand

Kind of started getting an idea of where.

00:09:53 Anand

General ideas of where is a good place to pop up which market is good? Which market is a little bit slower and all these areas have their own benefit. If you're just starting out, you don't want to be in a place that's super busy because you're you're developing your skill set, you're developing your setup.

00:10:13 Anand

Your or your flow and things.

00:10:15 Anand

So the slower part of the slower market is where you want to start.

00:10:20 Anand

And.

00:10:21 Anand

We really we kind of asked the question like where do we want to be.

00:10:26 Anand

Like, do we want to be around where we grew up, which is tequila or we want to be around Renton in the South end or Sodo or we want to just go for started Seattle and work our way?

00:10:36 Anand

Out from that way, because you know most of the farmers markets, the decent ones are.

00:10:44 Anand

Seattle. Redmond. You know, Tacoma?

00:10:48 Anand

Seattle being probably the busier 1, even though Redmond has.

00:10:52 Anand

The bigger one.

00:10:55 Anand

It was.

00:10:57 Anand

Is pretty straightforward for the most part. The organizers of these markets they were.

00:11:06 Anand

Encouraging, even if they didn't have a spot, they would point us in the right direction and we we got a lot of little bits of information everywhere. We got it just to kind of piece it all together for us to get started.

00:11:20 Anand

Yeah.

00:11:21 John

That's really cool. So you leverage a lot of the local markets. I see a bunch of them. So we definitely have businesses popping up in there and just getting their brand out there a little bit, getting customers, FaceTime, etc. You talked about one of your first kind of 30 seeds kind of experience like how did you get.

00:11:41 John

Like in contact with that.

00:11:43 John

Establishing that business. How did you? How did you get connect with them and how did that deal go?

00:11:43 John

So.

00:11:49 Anand

So the the owner of that program, he called it an incubator program and he was a he was a local chef. His name is chef Eric Rivera.

00:11:59 Anand

I don't think he's in the state anymore. He moved out and he's kind of traveling around doing the same thing.

00:12:05 Anand

UM.

00:12:07 Anand

The one of the owners of OCHA Thai.

00:12:11 John

Yeah.

00:12:12 Anand

He he's a friend of ours and before he got into ODA, he had done that pop up with that incubator program and this, quote UN quote restaurant was in Ballard kind of down the street from Ballard High School.

00:12:28 Anand

It was called ADO ADO.

00:12:31 John

Yeah, I know this place.

00:12:34 Anand

Yeah. And that's where we did our first.

00:12:38 John

That's that's cool.

00:12:39 Anand

When you pop up.

00:12:40 John

That's cool. That that's. That's amazing. So, like you really, you got to leverage your network and they help you find a place. I'm. I'm gonna flip the flip it a little bit now. Now that you're you have a running business. Are you interested in hosting other businesses as like a part of a pop up within yours.

00:13:01 Anand

That is something.

00:13:04 Anand

Short answer yes.

00:13:06 Anand

I.

00:13:07 Anand

Right now, we're not ready to do that.

00:13:10 John

I see.

00:13:11 Anand

And that's a couple of things we need to finish our renovations. Well, just updates, I should say updates rather than renovations.

00:13:22 Anand

And our kitchen can at the at the BBQ restaurant is very limited to what it can do.

00:13:29 Anand

It doesn't even have any stoves, necessarily, so that will limit what people can and can't do. That being said, we have hosted businesses for the chocolate crawl.

00:13:43 Anand

And we intend we're planning on hosting more for the like the Whiskey Brawl and stuff like that. Those kind of vendors, but they just bring in their product and and they showcase it inside our restaurant. We set them up you know and.

00:13:56 John

Yeah.

00:13:58 Anand

They get to talk about their product and they get to sell it right there and.

00:14:02 Anand

That kind of thing, yeah.

00:14:04 John

That makes sense.

00:14:07 John

Cool.

00:14:08 John

That that's cool.

00:14:09 John

That like, you're open to it and you're you're setting paths, getting your way there. How?

00:14:16 John

Do you actually look for other types of partnerships with businesses like do you think about like potentially, I don't know, building a shared product with?

00:14:26 John

I don't know. There's the full place down the street from you guys, right? You ever you guys ever consider, like, doing a collaboration where you do like I know in Texas there's a lot of.

00:14:33 John

Like BBQ smoke.

00:14:35 Anand

Yeah.

00:14:35 John

Brisket smoke lives pho, like, have you considered those types of like crossovers with other businesses?

00:14:38 Anand

Yeah.

00:14:42 Anand

That's. That's actually something on our radar as well.

00:14:47 Anand

We just relaunched our beef rib and it's those big Dino bones so and I don't want to approach anybody until.

00:14:51 John

Yeah, yeah.

00:14:58 Anand

That is kind of.

00:15:01 Anand

Kind of set of legs on its own, and because we just launched it a few weeks ago.

00:15:06 John

OK.

00:15:07 Anand

And it's doing good. You know, we've sold out every single weekend because we only sell on Friday through Sunday.

00:15:12 John

Hmm.

00:15:13 Anand

And.

00:15:15 Anand

Yeah, Asia and.

00:15:19 Anand

Papaya at the landing are.

00:15:23 Anand

We've had some communication back and forth with both those places that could potentially be interested.

00:15:30 John

That's great. And you just got connected to them with within like the kind of business community in.

00:15:34 John

Renton.

00:15:36 Anand

Papaya is actually owned by my mentor and and for Asia. I've just. I like to know my neighbors, so I talk to them frequently and check in with them and they're they're great people. Great.

00:15:45 John

Yeah.

00:15:50 John

The papaya ownership they own snowy village or something there too, right? Yeah.

00:15:56 Anand

Snowy and try tee shot.

00:16:00 John

All they own traw also. Wow. Yeah, that's that's really impressive.

00:16:02 Anand

Yeah.

00:16:05 Anand

And and there's, I think a couple more restaurants in Seattle.

00:16:08 John

OK.

00:16:10 John

UM.

00:16:11 John

Let's move on a little bit. I want to ask you some questions. When you're when you're actually acquiring Cedar River.

00:16:18 John

You know, did you have to, you know, you said it was kind of like off the market kind of acquisition. Did you have to leverage any brokers or did you did you need help like navigating that and like I don't know like lawyers or?

00:16:33 Anand

So.

00:16:38 Anand

My mentor is also a real estate agent and she knew that he was owner pretty well. She helped him at some point, so he was comfortable doing this off market with her.

00:16:48 John

I'll see.

00:16:54 Anand

Because of that relationship, and so she's she walked us through it.

00:17:01 Anand

And she said she did everything really redesigned paperwork.

00:17:05 John

That's pretty incredible. And did she take a cut? Just kind of just like, wow, that's like like, mind blown. So she just did it for the sake of, like, this is a great exchange. And I want to.

00:17:16 John

Like facilitate.

00:17:17 John

It it's like.

00:17:20 John

Unheard of from from brokers perspectives. That's pretty incredible.

00:17:25 Anand

Well, so it's there's a few more ties to her besides her being my mentor. My wife is in real estate.

00:17:34 John

Uh-huh.

00:17:34 Anand

And she worked under her team, my mentors team.

00:17:41 Anand

And so there was that tie to her and kind of built.

00:17:48 Anand

Built a relationship.

00:17:52 Anand

Through the introduction with my wife and she got to know us and what we were doing with Tolu and just kind of kept an eye on us at a distance with that. And then one day she decided that.

00:18:00 John

Amazing.

00:18:07 Anand

She wanted to meet with us and told us that she wants to figure out how we can work together.

00:18:12 John

That's amazing. That's that's that's so.

00:18:16 Anand

Underdog.

00:18:17 John

Yeah, it's unheard of and it's really inspiring too because you hear, I mean, now that I'm in this Business Network to some extent, I just hear of so many business owners like leaning in and helping each other, it's.

00:18:28 John

Yeah.

00:18:30 John

I'm also exposed to all the challenges.

00:18:35 John

But then I'm also exposed to kind of the goodness of the network of the people trying to help each other out. It's just really, really incredible. For the sake of time, I'm gonna keep asking you some more questions a little bit earlier. You did mention like, oh, we may, you know, thinking about growth, thinking about, like, where do we go next? Potential.

00:18:53 John

Actually, are you like set up for that? And like, as you do that like what types of technology will you leverage to help you get there like will you use a broker, will you, how will you find, how do you think you'll find your next location?

00:19:12 John

If you're not like ready to like even look for the next location we can.

00:19:15 Anand

Skip on this question. Yeah, well, it's it's something we've thought about and it's something.

00:19:25 Anand

There is a part of it that is in process right now, but I just don't want to talk about it. I'll give you. I'll give you general answer.

00:19:32 John

OK.

00:19:38 Anand

Tapping into the pop-up experience and doing the farmers markets and stuff like that, that was a great way to.

00:19:46 Anand

Get a read on the market and your audience and how they respond to your product.

00:19:54 John

M.

00:19:54 Anand

And so something along those lines is how we would test them.

00:20:00 Anand

Here in different neighborhoods.

00:20:03 Anand

That's how we probably.

00:20:07 Anand

Kind of figure out which direction we want to go.

00:20:10 John

Let's see. So you would like go do a pop up in that community and say, oh, we have a, you know, maybe do it, do it a few times and validate that, hey, this there's actually a big demand for this and.

00:20:20 John

Then you would go look.

00:20:22 John

For actual location in that area, based on the success of the popups, OK.

00:20:29 John

That's that's a really cool way to, like, narrow down your search and understand where.

00:20:32 John

You would go next.

00:20:34 John

Hmm.

00:20:36 John

And your path is. So unlike untraditional in some senses of, like establishing your first location that I I don't have a good like follow up question here. So maybe Aretha do you have any question about how like this process is for him and how and I'm like finding his next location.

00:20:53 Amritha

No, I I don't have anything like. I probably wanna ask like.

00:21:00 Amritha

Did you rely completely on your mentor for finding the location, or did you also do your research online about, you know, like the locations that you want to host in or like you know, sorry location you want to, you know, add your business and.

00:21:21 Amritha

You know, did you use any tools, Internet tech or something like that to find that location?

00:21:28 Anand

Uh.

00:21:32 Anand

Again, going it's it's very.

00:21:36 Anand

It's very unusual. Everything about how everything happens for us.

00:21:43 Anand

What aligned us with our mentor to begin with was our mindset.

00:21:49 Anand

And.

00:21:51 Anand

Truly believing, like the energy you put.

00:21:55 Anand

Out.

00:21:56 Anand

Into the everyday world is what you're.

00:21:57 Anand

Going to get.

00:21:58 Anand

Back and when we started moving forward on looking, searching for places, you know we did the traditional just searching through the Internet, searching through her network, searching through my wife's network, searching just by driving around and seeing what's available out there.

00:22:17 Anand

UM.

00:22:19 Anand

But we were also.

00:22:22 Anand

Really paying attention to what each of these places kind of.

00:22:27 Anand

Made us feel.

00:22:28 Anand

If the vibe was.

00:22:29 Anand

Good. And and all that and.

00:22:32 Anand

And.

00:22:34 Anand

Honestly, when I when Cedar River was presented to us.

00:22:41 Anand

It was.

00:22:43 Anand

It was so foreign that I was like, oh, what am I going to do with the BBQ restaurant? That's, you know, that's not the direction I wanted to go. So I like.

00:22:51 Anand

And then at that moment, I was finishing up our summer season at the market, which is our busy season, so.

00:22:57 Anand

I said well.

00:22:59 Anand

I want to finish this focus on this and get this wrapped up and then I can shift focus on everything else because I don't want to try to push thought on this.

00:23:08 Anand

When I can't wrap my head around her right now.

00:23:11 Anand

So.

00:23:13 Anand

When the season ended, I revisited it and and it was still available. I came in and my brother and I came in and we sat down. We actually there just kind of tipped the things in, met the ownership and and he gave us the after hours full tour of all the nuts and bolts of the place and.

00:23:33 Anand

And and then we kind of let it sit for about a month and.

00:23:39 Anand

Revisited the numbers.

00:23:44 Anand

The owner and my mentor and.

00:23:48 Anand

Started it all, started to make sense. It started to feel a lot better and not as intimidating.

00:23:57 Anand

You know, going from a little 10 by 10 pop up tent to a full brick and mortar restaurant that's fully functional.

00:24:05 Anand

So it was.

00:24:08 Anand

Things just.

00:24:11 Anand

Bold place.

00:24:15 Anand

That's really the sounds it's, it's.

00:24:16 Amritha

Yeah, but but fine.

00:24:19 John

It's such a good vibes feeling.

00:24:21 Amritha

Yeah, but it sounds really good. Yeah. Sorry, sorry.

00:24:22 Anand

Yeah, and and and.

00:24:26 Anand

Right.

00:24:26 Amritha

No, I was saying that it it was really good that your mentor actually connected you directly with the owner.

00:24:32 Amritha

There and you actually got to connect with the owner and set the expectations. That's that's very new. I've not like heard of that before. Like usually brokers want to do the mediation and the business owners don't get to meet or talk much to the landlords.

00:24:51 Anand

Yeah, yeah. And when another step further, we were quote UN quote hired by the previous owner to work there for a full month before we took it over officially. So it was like undercover boss for a month to really understand, you know, the weak points of the business going into it.

00:25:11 Anand

So it was it was very, very interesting from everything from the staff and how they treated us and the customer experience from both sides.

00:25:22 Anand

And any you know, seeing any issues that needed to be addressed immediately, any, any, any issues that would be in the red or yellow and we kind of categorized it so that we didn't address it immediately in that format.

00:25:41 Anand

Yeah, it was.

00:25:42 Anand

It happened fairly quick from when we made the decision. Like, OK, we're moving forward. It happened very quickly.

00:25:50 John

That's that's amazing. Let me ask you some more questions. We might run over. Are you OK with running over a little bit here?

00:25:58 Anand

Yeah, I'm. I'm good. I don't have any any other intentions on time.

00:26:03 John

Great. So.

00:26:05 John

Like a really general question like today when you need your supplies for running the business and when you need like a service say like you need a plumber or you need somebody to come build a counter or you know electrician to fix something. How do you go about finding those resources?

00:26:24 Anand

So I.

00:26:25 Anand

I if I don't already have one, I talk to my network of people in my neighborhood. My first of all, I have great neighbors that I share a like a loading dock with in the back of the restaurant. So I have the local the bar, which is my neighbor on the other side.

00:26:45 Anand

And Marianas and we're all kind of connected.

00:26:48 Anand

At the back.

00:26:50 Anand

So they come and go, they have free range into my kitchen and I and I go to the kitchen and we borrow sugar and everything else in between as just to make sure we get through the day. So we I tap into those guys before I I start going outwards and and Michael at McDonald's.

00:27:10 Anand

Part of that and OSHA Brian and and playing over there. Yeah, they're all part of that too.

00:27:18 John

That's that's really cool. We've heard this a lot, like the network, the referral through network is like way more meaningful than a Google search and it isn't. It almost doesn't even matter on cost. It's like I just trust that dude. Way more. Yeah, like work with them. So in the beginning, like, did you already have?

00:27:38 John

Kind of. The whole supply chain setup for like how do you acquire all your goods or have you literally like?

00:27:43 Anand

It was, it was obvious, established it was established to a point.

00:27:46 John

Yeah.

00:27:50 Anand

Granted, we did come in and reevaluate everything. We reevaluated all the vendors, we knew the, you know, the big names that most businesses use. You know you got your Cisco, you've got U.S. Foods, you've got Costco and.

00:28:10 Anand

And then you got your mom and pop shops kind of trickling out of that. There's a few more big name brands as well, but and those are the main three that was already established.

00:28:23 Anand

And.

00:28:25 Anand

Going through the revaluation process, you learn a lot about your reps and the company you're working with.

00:28:34 Anand

For example, U.S. Foods for a great guy. Amazing person you.

00:28:40 Anand

You need something that day. You would run it out personally to you.

00:28:45 Anand

But what he lacked was he he was about volume and he wouldn't necessarily look out for you. There were price changes.

00:28:54 Anand

You would just you please only focus.

00:28:55 Anand

On getting your product.

00:28:57 John

Hmm.

00:28:58 Anand

And that's where.

00:29:02 Anand

The old manager wasn't really paying attention to the numbers.

00:29:07 Anand

Hmm.

00:29:08 Anand

At one point, for example.

00:29:13 Anand

We had.

00:29:14 Anand

A case of eggs, which is about 50 eggs.

00:29:18 Anand

Everywhere else you can get it for between 12 to 14.

00:29:21 Anand

Bucks for that case.

00:29:23 Anand

Not today. Obviously today is it's a lot more expensive, but back, you know, a couple of years ago it was around that price, but.

00:29:32 Anand

We were paying \$70.00 for that case.

00:29:36 Anand

Yeah. And so when we started catching those things, we started paying attention to all the other invoices, realizing there were a big jump in prices there.

00:29:44 Anand

And so the thing that you're through this, they also own the Chef store.

00:29:51 Anand

And it's all the same company, but they don't really talk to each other. But you can go to the chef store.

00:29:54 Anand

And buy the \$14.00.

00:29:56 John

Eggs. Yeah, for much cheaper, yeah.

00:29:59 Anand

Well, I I told the Rep you know, and like this is this doesn't make sense. I'm not. I'm very, very upset about this actually.

00:30:06 Anand

It feels like we're being taken advantage of and we're a small shop that we got to watch our margins.

00:30:12 Anand

MHM.

00:30:13 Anand

And uh.

00:30:15 Anand

And it kept happening. So we reduced them to minimal.

00:30:21 Anand

Items to none, even though we still have an established account with them and we shipped it to Cisco, who the Rep there price matches for us consistently every week.

00:30:34 Anand

And make sure, Yep.

00:30:34 John

Without asking.

00:30:37 Anand

And that cell.

00:30:38 John

3.

00:30:38 Anand

Is, I would say that's a bit unusual for Rep to do, but he does.

00:30:43 Anand

It for us.

00:30:45 John

That's cool.

00:30:46 Anand

So you know, it gives us a little bit of Peace of Mind. We still keep an eye on our numbers, but.

00:30:50 Anand

You know.

00:30:52 Anand

It's it's nice to have a couple.

00:30:53 Anand

Of.

00:30:53 Anand

Layers of that kind of looking out for you.

00:30:58 John

OK. That's that's really that's great. We we hear this a lot of new businesses like they figure out their first supply chain, they keep evaluating iterating and getting better and after some time they optimize and they've gotten it almost as much as they can out.

00:31:16 John

I'm going to ask you like a really quick like, I just want you to list them off. OK? Like, I just want to know what technology you use today to run the business and just rattle them off. I think we've heard of most of them. So we kind of know what all of them are and if we don't know any, we'll ask you about them a little bit more.

00:31:34 Anand

Our main.

00:31:37 Anand

Our main one our PLS system which is tied to our TV screen, menus and all that and tied to our kitchen system is a it's a I think they're. I think they're finally out of historic phase there. It's a company called Snack Pass.

00:31:53 Anand

And there there's only a handful of snack pass uses in Washington. They're based out of California. So we're we're kind of helping them beta test a lot of teachers, which is we knew that signing up with them because we want to help them develop it as well.

00:32:00 John

Mm-hmm.

00:32:05 John

Hmm.

00:32:13 Anand

So our POS system, our kiosk software kiosks, our TV screens are all tied into the system and then we're integrated. We have integration third party company that ties our delivery app into that system as well.

00:32:36 Anand

Start that.

00:32:40 Anand

I mean we we we do our Google, Facebook, Instagram.

00:32:48 Anand

Posts and marketing stuff there. We don't really touch Yelp much at all.

00:32:55 Anand

It's personally I don't have. I've never had good experiences there, Google and.

00:33:02 Anand

Delivery app reviews and all that do a lot further for us.

00:33:06 John

What do you use for accounting and like bookkeeping payroll?

00:33:10 Anand

So we use an app called home base.

00:33:16 Anand

And it's it's a free app for our time card you're keeping and we just have a iPad set up and and in place to clock in.

00:33:25 Anand

And out of that.

00:33:26 Anand

And then we turn that into our.

00:33:31 Anand

We do half of the payroll.

00:33:34 Anand

In house and then we turn it into an.

00:33:36 Anand

Account to do the taxes for us.

00:33:39 John

I OK.

00:33:39 Anand

Let's see. And then we print out the checks. We do hard checks.

00:33:42 John

OK.

00:33:43 John

UM.

00:33:46 John

There's a more general question amongst all this technology. Like, do you see any opportunities for the technologies to just be better to help you do what you do a little bit?

00:33:56 John

I don't know more effectively.

00:33:58 Anand

Yeah, absolutely. So my brother and our manager.

00:34:06 Anand

They're both including myself. We're all kind.

00:34:09 Anand

Of.

00:34:11 Anand

Diving into learning as much as we can about AI and how we can utilize.

00:34:18 Anand

Into our marketing or any other aspect of the business that can that can be automated, anything admin anything like that?

00:34:30 Anand

Absolutely something like that where it could be a little bit more hands off, be it social media posts or keeping our Google page optimized. Are you sure the right keywords are there? You know just doing something other than everything.

00:34:48 Anand

Keyed in manually right now will be.

00:34:51 Anand

Cool.

00:34:54 John

That's just a like, you know, maybe maybe this is what I hear and what I sense out of this is that like every small business is, like, so deep in the operational day-to-day and just trying to keep the lights on, keep the business going forward, trying to scale and it's like, wait, you want me to do?

00:35:10 John

Like marketing and you want me to do.

00:35:12 Anand

Yeah, yeah.

00:35:13 John

Other things like you just need like some help to optimize some of these other things that you can't put a lot of.

00:35:19 John

Time and energy towards yeah, so.

00:35:23 Anand

What I've noticed and I'm starting to understand better why you know your favorite restaurant might.

00:35:30 Anand

Start to feel like they're going downhill and and then you start paying attention to how many, what their staffing looks like. So we originally when we took over we had 12 up to 15 employees.

00:35:44 Anand

At one point, uh, not all full timers.

00:35:48 Anand

About half of that was full time.

00:35:51 Anand

UM, today we have 5.

00:35:55 Anand

We have 5 because we've streamlined so much of the kitchen. We streamlined and optimized every aspect there is so that we can run with five people and and when we're open seven days, 2 shifts.

00:36:09 John

Yeah.

00:36:11 John

Well.

00:36:13 Anand

No, that's as late as we'd like to be, you know? But it works. We can definitely.

00:36:17 Anand

Do this all day long.

00:36:20 Anand

So labor, as you know is is the biggest expense in the business and cutting that down to that number was a big deal. But we figured out a way to make it work.

00:36:33 Anand

The point I was trying to make is.

00:36:36 Anand

When you notice at your favorite restaurant, the staffing is minimal and the quality is down. It's because.

00:36:44 Anand

In the back end, the ownership is having to focus on a lot more on on the everything that's not in the front of the House, right?

00:36:53 Anand

And so that shifts your focus away from the quality.

00:36:58 John

Hmm.

00:36:59 Anand

So if if you're able to automate or have you know farm out that work that.

00:37:05 Anand

Is like your social media, like your bookkeeping and all that stuff. Then your focus shifts back into the restaurant and you can get it back up to where it needs to be.

00:37:15 John

Let's see.

00:37:16 John

That's so like maybe the rephrase is a little bit like.

00:37:22 John

You found ways to optimize your labor so that you can actually really focus on your craft.

00:37:28 Anand

Yeah.

00:37:29 John

That's exactly. That's really cool. That's like a that's a really, really, like, great, you know, story to hear. And because we do hear, you know, businesses that have struggled with staffing. So it sounds like you really don't have that many challenges with staff.

00:37:47 John

So whatever you're doing there, it's working, so maybe I'll ask that questions like, how do you think your staffing that is different from maybe some of these other companies that see higher turnover and or just like more staffing challenges?

00:38:02 John

What? What? What helps you stand out and be really great in that here other than like the optimizations to the other parts of the ecosystem so that you can focus on this.

00:38:13 Anand

If you would have asked me that a year ago, I I would just say.

00:38:22 Anand

I would have said.

00:38:25 Anand

It's just the culture company culture. But if you ask me that today, I would say.

00:38:36 Anand

Creating the right culture.

00:38:39 Anand

The right company environment.

00:38:41 Anand

And ensuring each employee.

00:38:47 Anand

It's still.

00:38:50 Anand

How do I word this?

00:38:52 Anand

They're still able to focus on their own personal life goals.

00:38:57 Anand

Even though they're helping us build ours.

00:38:59 John

Yeah, yeah.

00:39:01 Anand

And I we've.

00:39:03 Anand

I've personally had.

00:39:06 Anand

Those conversations with each one of my employees where we talk about what's the bigger picture, what's the dream scenario you have all the money in the world, you have all the time in the world. What are you doing?

00:39:16 Anand

Yeah.

00:39:17 Anand

And you know we we talked about that and and.

00:39:22 Anand

My longest standing employee, she's been the company for 16 years.

00:39:27 Anand

And.

00:39:29 Anand

When I asked that she he was, she didn't know what to do with that. She she got up and got really uncomfortable and was like, I don't want to talk about this. No one's asked.

00:39:41 Anand

Me that before.

00:39:42 John

Hmm.

00:39:43 Anand

And as if you know the answer just.

00:39:45 Anand

Just think about.

00:39:45 Anand

It and we could talk about this later.

00:39:48 Anand

You know, it took me about 3.

00:39:49 Anand

Weeks to finally.

00:39:50 Anand

Have a conversation about that with her and and.

00:39:55 Anand

Always asking questions about them personally and in the respect of, like, where do you want to be and and making sure that I'm doing my part to make sure they they are on track to get the to those goals and not just working on day in day out job and just talking.

00:40:15 Anand

Now, because I feel in turn they they want to be here and that in turn.

00:40:15 John

Yeah.

00:40:25 Anand

Has them focused on the details a little bit more for me, so I have more set of more eyes on the same details. I I have to yeah, watch out for. Yeah.

00:40:36 John

That's amazing and that's.

00:40:39 John

I definitely think you and Michael maybe have talked or have been influenced by the same kind of like emphasis on culture and investing in people. Yeah, that's that's really, really cool to see. I have only a handful more questions.

00:40:53 John

This one we've just added to our list cuz we've been looking around lately, but there's a bunch of business communities. There's like the downtown Renton Association, there's like SBA. There's like, I don't know, there's a bunch of them, right?

00:41:11 John

Guys, have you've been engaged with those communities and what have they offered you and kind of?

00:41:18 John

How has it been helpful slash effective in helping you reach your goals?

00:41:25 Anand

So we're we're a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

00:41:29 Anand

At.

00:41:32 Anand

So far this is the only Chamber that I've seen that's proactive about.

00:41:39 Anand

The businesses in downtown Renton.

00:41:41 Anand

MHM.

00:41:44 Anand

I see the chairman.

00:41:46 Anand

Diane, she's out walking around. She walks into the restaurant frequently, almost weekly. Just say hi or actually buying food or.

00:41:57 Anand

And like even like uh, suggesting slash, defending us on social media, you know, when the trolls out there.

00:42:09 Anand

So it's it's very.

00:42:13 Anand

Weirdly refreshing to have that experience and they they include us in these events like the chocolate crawl and the don't mind lock and all that stuff that's coming up.

00:42:25 Anand

The downtown Renton connection.

00:42:30 Anand

We're. I'm not sure where we stand with them physically. If we're part of that or not, but they have helped us out, included us in in several different events that were happening.

00:42:43 John

That's awesome.

00:42:43 Anand

And they've hosted their.

00:42:47 Anand

They do these launch things where they focus on rent and business, then they go all. They invite all members of that community to come out and just have lunch at this one designated as it's a weekly thing actually.

00:43:02 John

Hmm.

00:43:07 John

This is really. Yeah, it's really cool to see. I think I met Diane. She has two.

00:43:10 John

Big dogs, right? Yes.

00:43:12 John

Yeah, I've met her. Yeah, she has two big dogs. She came to Kobe's cafe event once. Yeah, she didn't bring the dogs, but my man, she's super nice. It was. I was like when I was talking to. I was like, wait. So like you were, like the one in charge of this old movie businesses. And how do you help them thrive?

00:43:23 Anand

Yeah.

00:43:26 John

How do you ensure like every one of these core fronts is filled and you know, just really trying to foster a community so that personal touch is really powerful?

00:43:36 Anand

Yeah, he's been in in that.

00:43:40 Anand

For a long.

00:43:41 John

Time. Yeah, she mentioned that her whole family has been kind of involved in that community for a long, long time. It's really cool. It's like, amazing to see her investing back into that community.

00:43:49 John

But.

00:43:49 John

Like I wonder.

00:43:52 John

Outside of like, making sure that you're engaged in kind of the community wide events or things that happen that you guys can do together. Are there other ways that they can help you or other ways they've offered to help you?

00:44:06 John

I'm kind of curious how else you are leveraging that.

00:44:10 John

Network maybe not leveraging, but like working together with them on it.

00:44:10 Anand

So we're.

00:44:14 Anand

We're fairly new into the membership with her now every time I've called her, she's picked up the phone.

00:44:23 Anand

Any idea of any?

00:44:26 Anand

Any questions any the most recent conversation I had was about.

00:44:34 Anand

Any grants or anything like that that we should be aware of?

00:44:39 Anand

And see.

00:44:42 Anand

She made a point to.

00:44:45 Anand

Looked into it that week and then and then we had a follow up call and and, you know, she told me what she found. And prior to that I had an idea of trying to find.

00:45:00 Anand

The right influencer and partnering with them and bringing them down.

00:45:06 Anand

With the Chamber as their host and just showing them around downtown Renton and all the new stuff that's happening and she was all for that. So you know whether or not that pans out, we'll see. But you know, she so far, every time I've called with any name, she's been open.

00:45:16 John

Hmm.

00:45:27 Anand

You and and then when she finds something, that's a good thing for her, it also brings it to her attention.

00:45:35 John

That's great.

00:45:38 John

Amrita, you have any questions?

00:45:39 Amritha

Yeah, I wanna ask, like, have you thought of, like, doing mentorship and, you know, like, probably provide back into the society with the Chamber? So has that happened or like, are you interested in that? Haven't you?

00:45:58 Anand

Kind of is happening right now. One of my employees, DJ, he's he's only 19. I've never seen a 19 year old this focused on.

00:46:11 Anand

Anything he he shows up to work.

00:46:16 Anand

Early, if not on time, every single day, and he walks to work like 3 or 4 miles and no complaints comes in, knows exactly what he needs to do, gets into it. On the flip side of it, you know, after having conversations of what's the bigger picture for him? He wants to start a cookie business and.

00:46:36 Anand

And once they're incorporating his artwork into.

00:46:40 Anand

The cookies.

00:46:41 Anand

And so we set up a station for him in our basement. That's his workstation for his cookies and developing that.

00:46:51 Anand

And and we talked about that and we talked about different ideas and those test batches of these cookies. And so we're helping him develop that and and he gets to see first hand.

00:47:04 Anand

How do you deal with suppliers? How to?

00:47:08 Anand

On a day-to-day deal with customers coming from a kid that barely spoke. But it is work.

00:47:16 Anand

He's now customer facing as well.

00:47:20 Anand

And the next two weeks from now, and I actually took it, taking him to a food show.

00:47:25 Anand

And and kind of throwing that side of it because that's kind of the fun part of the job too. You have to go sample that just stuff.

00:47:34 Anand

And.

00:47:36 Anand

And then there's another lady, our dessert lady.

00:47:40 Anand

She.

00:47:43 Anand

She's she loves eating desserts and wants to make it a a side business and if it picks up enough, she would commit to doing it full time.

00:47:52 Anand

And so we're helping to develop our menu and the actually sell our product in our restaurant. Right now we have 2 product right now. We're developing more with our.

00:48:03 John

That's that's so cool. That's so cool. I like.

00:48:04 Amritha

Yeah, that's very inspiring.

00:48:07 John

Yeah, like nobody. Like, nobody asks you to do it. The fact that you just did it and like, in supporting your staff and in their own missions and their own goals is like, Super, super inspiring. And your experience has been.

00:48:20 John

So well-rounded.

00:48:23 John

You've seen a little bit of the whole path to validation, optimization, scaling, staffing, technology like you're like supporting this technology like snack, Snack Pass. I think that is that's incredible, cuz now you've just you've gotten the exposure to do so many challenges and face so many problems that like you could probably.

00:48:44 John

You're probably feeling pretty good about.

00:48:47 John

Knowing the the P 99% of risks going into the next one, yeah.

00:48:54 Anand

A new adventure?

00:48:55 John

Yeah, yeah.

00:48:56 Amritha

I feel like you should put that in your Instagram. You know, like show that as a story, because I mean, I was just talking to one of the restaurant owner from Driftwood and he he was saying that what really worked was, you know, showing the journey of how you read.

00:49:15 Amritha

And the struggles people really love seeing. And we say not in love. People want to see how the whole thing is established. So I mean, you've got really good inspiring stories, yeah.

00:49:30 John

It's it's, it's hard. I I know I had a similar conversation with Michael too, and he's like I'm just not the type to talk about myself. Just had that post on Instagram and I shared it. I was like, this is brilliant. I love seeing hearing about your story and how you got here. And he was like.

00:49:38 Anand

Yeah.

00:49:45 John

You know, people identify with small businesses cuz it's the people behind them. They don't want to like, go eat at a faceless organization or a big company. You know, these small businesses have that opportunity to really showcase their stories and like, I mean, this is such an inspiring story like you should definitely talk about it. I know I think you're already working with.

00:50:05 John

Lisa and maybe with Chun?

00:50:08 John

UMI met with them on Monday for some other stuff with Michael, so they they mentioned that they were talking to you. That's that's amazing.

00:50:16 Anand

Yeah. Lisa is actually our manager.

00:50:18 John

Cool. Cool. Yeah. Like, just she happened to be at the same meeting as, and she said, like, I worked for Cedar River.

00:50:25 John

And.

00:50:25 John

I was like interesting, but yeah.

00:50:29 John

I we can cut the recording here. I have two follow up questions that are kind of like we don't need to record.