

Tasting Rooms - Neil Cycle Brewing

I'm Neil Whitney, I work for Cycle Brewing, and I'm going to talk a little bit about how to run a tasting room.

I get kegs from the brewery that we run down in Gulfport currently. We write them up on the board, I give my bar staff a brief description of what we're selling so they can disperse that knowledge amongst any of our patrons. And that's pretty much it.

We do some specialty events with some barrel aged products, as well one-off beers, which are usually pretty exciting.

I'm involved in most of the brewing processes here as well. So I do actually get to make the beer with the head brewer. So I do usually have a basic understanding, if not more than that, or even some influence, at times, in what we're getting and what we make.

So at Cycle it's a really important thing for us to create the best possible experience for a customer. And in doing so, we have to make sure that our staff is trained properly. Currently we are doing a lot of textbook questions where I ask them what a hot variety is, what that provides for a beer. And most of my staff can now state anything that I ask them.

We just started recently doing a sensory analysis where I give them three or four blind taste tests and they have to pick out which beers they are to make sure they fully understand it, not just from a textbook stance but from this is what the beer tastes like and this is how it lands on my palate.

One of the bigger things that I really push from my beer background, I worked in a few beer bars where you have things that people just don't know. I made a point not to put a description on our menu and I made it a point not to put a style, typically. So it forces in interaction with your bartender. I really enjoy talking to people about beer and figuring out that they like things that they don't think they like. When they come in and say they don't like hoppy but I give them three hoppy beers they really enjoy, it's awesome.

Almost everyone, at some point, has had a beer. And almost everyone that's had a beer, it's either a good or a bad experience. And realistically, there's always a beer out there for someone even if they say they hate it, they can find something that falls into that category that's amazing.

Homebrewing is where I started and ultimately it made me become more passionate about something than I've ever been before. And it's something everyone should at least try, because then you get a different perspective on what you're consuming.

Brewing beer is not something that everyone can do well. I mean, everyone can do it and you can make something drinkable. But to see someone's expression on their face when they drink something you made,

something you created, is amazing. There's nothing else to describe it.