

**Ask SCORE for Business Advice**

**“Ask SCORE” Column**

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**Taking a risk can lead to success in business by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt**

When Jim Constine decided to open The Vault in De Pere, he said that it had gotten to the point where he could live with failure more than he could live with not trying. Now, just two years later, he has not only succeeded, he is partner in a second restaurant a few doors away.

The second business, Bistro on Broadway, is a completely different concept. Where The Vault serves more of a pub menu, the Bistro is upscale with an emphasis on wine, food, and décor.

"It's close to The Vault so it had to be a unique business model," Constine explained. "I didn't want to compete against myself. There was no upscale wine bar in De Pere and customers were asking for it."

He partnered with Mark Quinlan and they utilized personal strengths to develop the new concept. Quinlan tends to be a numbers person while Constine is more into actual operations. It took just 38 days for them to sign a lease, redesign the space, and open for business. To fine-tune, they decided on a soft opening where customers could provide input.

Constine said, "I told them to be brutally honest. Don't tell us the wine tastes good. Tell us if something took too long, didn't taste good, was cold, or if something else wasn't up to par. We wanted to know what was wrong so we could fix it before opening."

What he discovered was that there were some issues in getting food out on time when the restaurant is crowded. He and Quinlan worked with the staff to handle busy times by being upfront and offering a glass of wine, drink, or dessert if there are problems. Constine believes that communication is a vital part of customer service.

Because of the type of restaurant it is, Constine says that customers like to linger and have raved about the atmosphere. "Both places are smaller and more intimate. When someone walks through the door, they become a friend," he said.

With long hours and numerous sacrifices, Constine has made a lot of friends. When he opened The Vault, he rented out his home and moved his family of five into the upstairs apartment. Only recently did Constine and his wife decide on a new family home that is near the restaurants. He credits his family with being understanding and says that he's beginning to see the big picture. It includes the two restaurants, rental properties, and more free time.

He noted, "I actually see a time when I can take a step back and turn over some of the everyday duties to staff. If everything works according to my business plan, and things click, I want to have more of a managerial role."

In the interim, he says that he has learned that you have to risk big to win big. That includes working hard, listening to your customers, adapting as needed, being thick skinned, and giving customers a reason to choose your restaurant.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.