



Jack's BLEND

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THE COFFEEHOUSE AS A "THIRD PLACE"

The coffeehouse, defined from a cultural standpoint, is a place that largely serves as a center of social interaction. It provides members with a place to congregate, talk, write, read, surf the Web, e-mail, entertain one another, or pass the time, whether individually or in small groups, as well as purchasing from a menu of coffee and/or other food and drink items.

Ray Oldenburg, author of the book, "The Great Good Place," coined the term "the third place" to describe a place that was unique from the first place (home) and the second place (work). He argues that, "third places are important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement and establishing feelings of a sense of place." They are "anchors" of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction.

Coffee is, of course, a key ingredient to a coffeehouse, although not necessarily the largest sales category. It may be served by an employee, self-served from "honor pots" or have the "bottomless cup" designation (don't get me started). But the coffeehouse, as defined here, is more than a just a place to get coffee. It is a place of community, typically with generous seating, a common area where people purchase, gather and greet one another, is highly accessible, is proximate for walking distance, involves "regulars," is welcoming and comfortable, and a place at which both new and old friends can be found.

Coffeehouses, beyond coffee, are important because they provide a connection for the populace. Years ago, before society became fractured and independent, many communities had the local ice cream parlor, downtown square, main street, post office, or other "third place" as places of social vitality. But as society fractured, the family structure changed, remote controls were placed on garage doors and TV became the mainstay of free time,

people have become more isolated than ever. The need for a social outlet is a base human need and it has found itself at coffeehouses. People have been drawn to them often without realizing they were fulfilling their own social need as much as they were getting caffeinated.

Not all coffee businesses are, or want to be, a third-place coffeehouse. Some entrepreneurs have created wonderful coffee drive-thrus, kiosks, carts and small retail outlets without seating or other venues for the serving of great coffee, the importance of which is all the more critical at a place that only sells coffee. Whereas a coffeehouse patron can, besides coffee, often get great quality tea, hot chocolate or other custom-made drinks, not to mention bottled beverages or food items. Coffee does not have to be part of a purchase to hang out at the local coffeehouse.

It is from this vantage point that I live. JP's, like many coffeehouses, is a true third place. We have all the telltale signs that peg us as a community center, as well as a being a local dealer for caffeine, I mean seller of coffee. I, along with many of you, value the service we bring to our community as much as I enjoy creating excellence in our coffee and espresso drinks. While pointing to the line of people at the register, people have often asked me, "Jack, did you ever think that you would be this successful?" My response has always been, "You know, I always felt we would be successful, but that's my entrepreneur's optimistic bent. The thing I never saw was the connection with the community, the social aspect and the gathering place that we would become."

For those of you who own and operate such a place, be proud of the fact that you offer a great service to your community. You have become the "third place" that was missing in your location. The gathering place where people meet, society interacts and the lubrication of great coffee makes it all worth the while.

