



Bet on a Brown...or White Rat?

- *Al E. Bavry, President Emeritus, Kimal Lumber*

O.k. Bet that got your attention...And this story comes with a “warning label.” It’s probably going to upset some folks as you read into it, but as my Tennessee mother-in-law, Mimi, used to say, “If you think it, might as well say it!”

Charles “Red” Scott was a highly successful business creator who built, operated, and sold a number of successful companies. He had a set of “Cardinals” he lived by. One was, “Bet on a brown rat – not a white rat.” So, first about rats...Brown rats (mainly wild) are incredibly street smart, very clever and even devious. Have you ever tried to catch them when they get into a residence, commercial building, or wherever? Once you’ve gotten the first one, catching the second or third ones gets harder and harder. What usually happens is the “Street Smart” rats wise up and move on. Anyone that’s ever had to deal with rats know they ain’t dumb! So, White rats...Usually see them in labs. Usually docile...Even turned into pets occasionally. And yet they’re very smart--but not “Street Smart”--just smart in a different way.

So, let’s segue that rat scenario into “People.” And just to take the stigma off a bit, I’m probably more a brown than a white rat. I’ve worked in the lumberyards, driven fork-lifts and trucks, stocked bins, etc. There’s plenty of blue collar (brown rat) in my beginnings. So, with the white rats...Think white collar, as in the folks that often work “in the back office,” collecting money, paying bills, keeping the books, and handling many other administrative and accounting functions. Many white rats come with a “pedigree,” such as college degrees, PHDs, etc. to qualify them for the tasks they’re performing.

So, a quick clarification from my standpoint. Neither brown nor white is “better” or “worse” (my word) than the other. And a further description of the different roles...I’m pretty good at operations...So, I lay out a new yard...I feel good...Hey! I’ve done this a lot...I’m smart. Then, I turn my “brilliant” plan over to our operations guy (a good ole boy Harley biker!) and he basically shreds by two thirds some of my great ideas! Turns out, his common sense “in his head” layout and organization is far better than mine...(Trust a brown rat!!) And pretty soon, some of his ideas, along with some of my ideas, become “The New Plan” and we’re off and running.

And now my summary, and why I feel it’s so vitally important to know and understand these different dynamics. Those of us that are “White Rats” (and have to understand and make the numbers work at the end of the day) absolutely need to work in tandem with the “Brown Rats.” We need each other. We wouldn’t be paying our bills, buying the next new truck we need, that additional inventory, etc., if those folks on the front lines (blue collar, brown rat) didn’t figure out our brilliant plan, pull it together and make it work...Sometimes in spite of our smarts!

So, the takeaway...always, as Pogo might say, is “We needs each other...!” Good selling, and great partnering...And sorry about being so “Politically Incorrect!!”