

DATE NIGHT?

Where is the first place you take someone who's visiting a big city like Chicago? From camera-friendly views at the Hancock Observatory to shopping on Michigan Avenue and then grabbing some deep dish at Lou Malnati's — depending on the Chicagoan you ask, suggestions could run a Magnificent Mile long.

When my parents came to visit Chi-town for the first time, well, I took them to a grocery store. In defense, it wasn't your typical paper or plastic grocer. We went to the relatively new Lincoln Park Whole Foods — a place I refer to as "The greatest shopping experience...ever."

Sensory Overload

While it's far from the cheapest grocery chain on the block, there are a multitude of reasons why Whole Foods gets my business.

The Lincoln Park Whole Foods provides us grocery shoppers an escape from the usual elevator music and lines at the deli counter.

With samples of cookies, gelato, fancy cheeses, crackers and wine up for the tasting on any given visit, this market has turned a weekly chore into a social experience. And I didn't even mention the full bar, the masseuse, a classroom, the soundstage, a sushi station and wine bar — all strategically spaced throughout the store.

It's not uncommon to see a male shopper stocking up on produce while sipping a tall glass of beer. And speaking of the wine bar, impromptu "date nights" are starting to pop up before heading over to the dairy section for the milk and eggs.

Whole Foods has really redefined what it means to go to the grocery store.

Going Out

What does this mean to you? Well, to put it simply, I think you and Whole Foods share a lot of similarities. For starters, independent garden centers aren't known for being the cheapest place in town, nor should you. That's for those big, honkin' places that lack character. You should be known more for the experience you provide your customer and all five of their senses.

You'll see on page 46 that William Taylor explains it best. William is the cofounder of *Fast Company* magazine and in January he gave a terrific keynote at ANLA's New Clinic in Louisville. He shares with you the story of a unique bank out of Oregon and how it can help make your business more memorable.

During William's keynote, he said this: When it comes to looking for new ideas, we need to step outside of our circle of friends. We already know everything they know and vice versa. There are no surprises. It's time we start looking at other successful business models outside of our industry to get inspired.

As for my parents, don't worry, my tour guide skills gradually improved once I got some food in my stomach.



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