



First Job Fridays: Brian Niccol

Posted on February 19, 2016

https://informationstation.org/kitchen_table_econ/first-job-fridays-brian-niccol/

Many of America's most well-known CEOs spent years, even decades, climbing the career ladder. They built their careers and reputations from the ground up—coming in early, leaving late, and soaking in the valuable experiences of professional life. Along the way, they acquired the skills necessary for executive leadership.

In our regular First Job Friday feature on Information Station, we profile industry leaders who spent years striving for success—and learned requisite leadership skills along the way.

This week, we're focusing on Brian Niccol, the CEO of Taco Bell. The lessons that Niccol now applies leading one of the country's most recognizable restaurant chains stems from a young age: As a teenager, he started a lawn-mowing business with a few childhood friends, receiving contracts to mow lawns in his neigh-

borhood. The young entrepreneur and his associates mowed everything from residential yards to office park expanses, especially focusing their efforts on higher-paying customers for more earnings per lawn. While they accepted as many jobs as they could possibly manage, Niccol soon learned pricing varied by location, so he committed to finding the best business opportunities in the neighborhood. Niccol also realized that "marketing was a must" when looking for new customers and lawns to mow—effectively communicating what his team offered (and others didn't) was often the difference between finding work and not.

As head of a major American fast-food chain, Niccol now appreciates the business acumen he gained so early on. "At the time you do it, you don't realize how it's influencing you going forward," he admits. "I think it carries on with you in the subconscious." Niccol

recently wrote that "the importance and value of that first job remains unchanged," acknowledging that he's "still applying lessons from [his] early jobs—things like the importance of marketing, learned while running a local lawn-mowing business as a teenager."

Niccol firmly believes that "early experiences have proven to be formative over [his] career." And while the stakes might have changed—Niccol's task is to now differentiate Taco Bell from other competitors—he hasn't.

In his mind, "marketing is a must" whether you're selling a Cheesy Gordita Crunch to a hungry customer or some grass-cutting expertise to a neighbor next door.