

*Rooted in Rural: How
Community, Creativity, and
Customized Employment
Drive Inclusive Work in Small
Towns*

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Overview

- **Challenges & Unique Opportunities of Rural Job Development**
- **Community Integration Matters**
- **Customized Employment (CE) Unlocking Self-Employment**
- *Stories:*
 - Em's Coffee Co. → coffee + community connection
 - Clifford Family Farms → livestock & hands-on work opportunities
- **Engaging Local Champions, Building Trust, & Steward Relationships**
- **Policy, Funding, & Systems Alignment to Support Rural Entrepreneurship**
- **Closing – Reimagine What's Possible**

Why Rural Matters

- The CDC reports that about one-third of adults in rural communities live with a disability.
- The Census Bureau (via ACS data) shows 14.7% of rural residents have a disability, compared to 12.6% of urban resident.
- Higher unemployment & underemployment rates than urban peers
- Rural workforce shortages = untapped opportunities
- Strong community ties can be leveraged for inclusion

Challenges in Rural Job Development

- Limited industries / fewer large employers
- Transportation barriers & lack of public transit
- Misconceptions about disability & work
- Geographic isolation (fewer providers & supports)

Opportunities in Rural Communities

- Tight-knit networks → easier relationship building
- Entrepreneurial spirit & small business focus
- Word-of-mouth reputation = powerful marketing tool
- Local champions & community pride

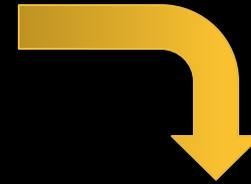
Customized & Self Employment

- Flexible, creative roles in artisan shops, farms, family-owned businesses
- Aligning unmet community needs with individual strengths
- Traditional job openings are scarce/hard to compete in
- Pathway when traditional jobs don't fit
- Combines entrepreneurship with ongoing supports
- Example: Em's Coffee Co. → community hub + inclusive employer

Party Planner



Lover of horses



Clifford Family Farms



Relationships and Champions

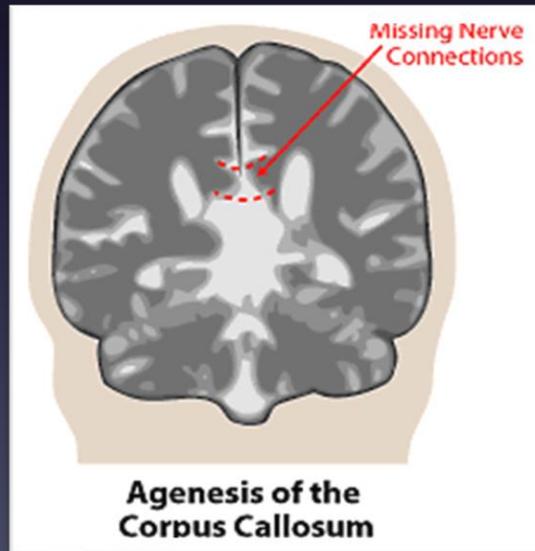
Local Champions Matter

- Mentors, faith groups, civic leaders, small business owners
- Provide credibility, open doors, and sustain long-term support

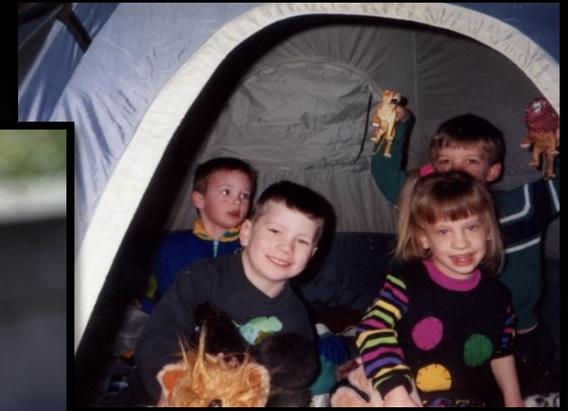
Building Trust

- Be a customer
- Relationships > programs
- Word-of-mouth carries weight
- Show up consistently & follow through

Emilea



School and Family



Employment Expectations

- Rural Community
- Transition from High School
- Limited Employment Opportunities
- Need for Support
- Sheltered Workshop



Changing Employment Expectations

- Real life happenings in the work place
- Employment opportunities available in rural Iowa
- Self -employment consideration
- Identify next steps...

Conversations

- Started with pulling the team together and brainstorming
 - Self employment...oh the many ideas
- Who is Em? Think Discovery...
 - Morning person, conversationalist, great memory for details, everyone knows her and often loves her
- What does Independence need?
 - What skills of Em's could Independence benefit from?

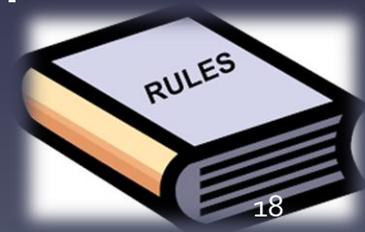


The Naysay-ers

- How will that work?
- “Oh that’s interesting...”
- She wont run 100% of her business
- I don’t know any grants for that kind of thing...

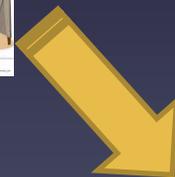
Pushing Rules and Policy

- Vocational Rehabilitation...she won't operate 100% of her business
- Medicaid...how does job coaching work for self-employment? Will I need a provider?
 - Use of Self-Directed Medicaid Funds for coaching
- Find an insider to help guide and connect you!



Research

- You have to test feasibility
- Talk to previous coffee shop owners
- Visit every coffee shop in a 40-60 mile radius
- Talk to local businesses to gauge interest



Building

- Finding a building...
- Funding a building...
 - Creative approaches to make the numbers work
 - Various renters to keep rent low

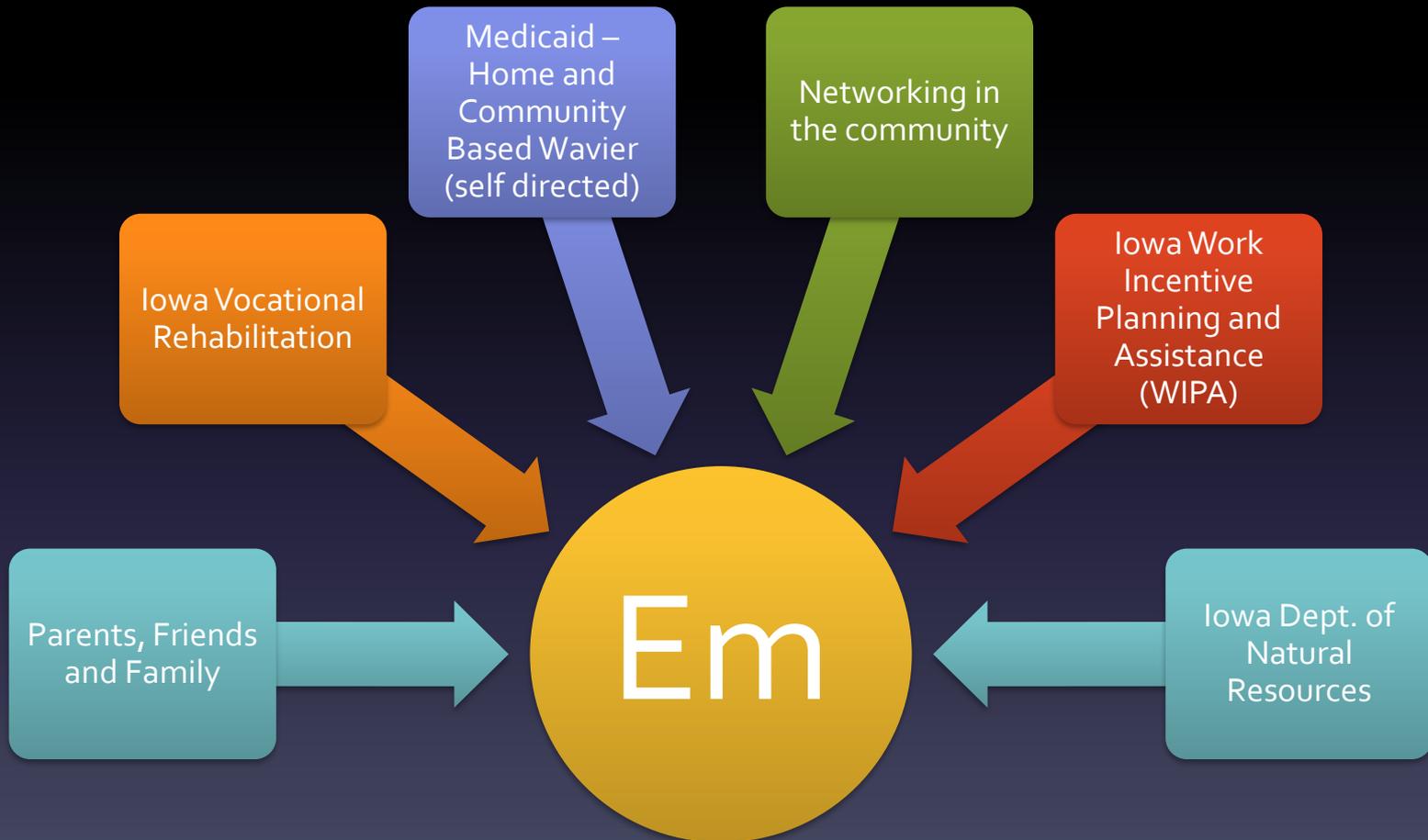


Marketing and Training

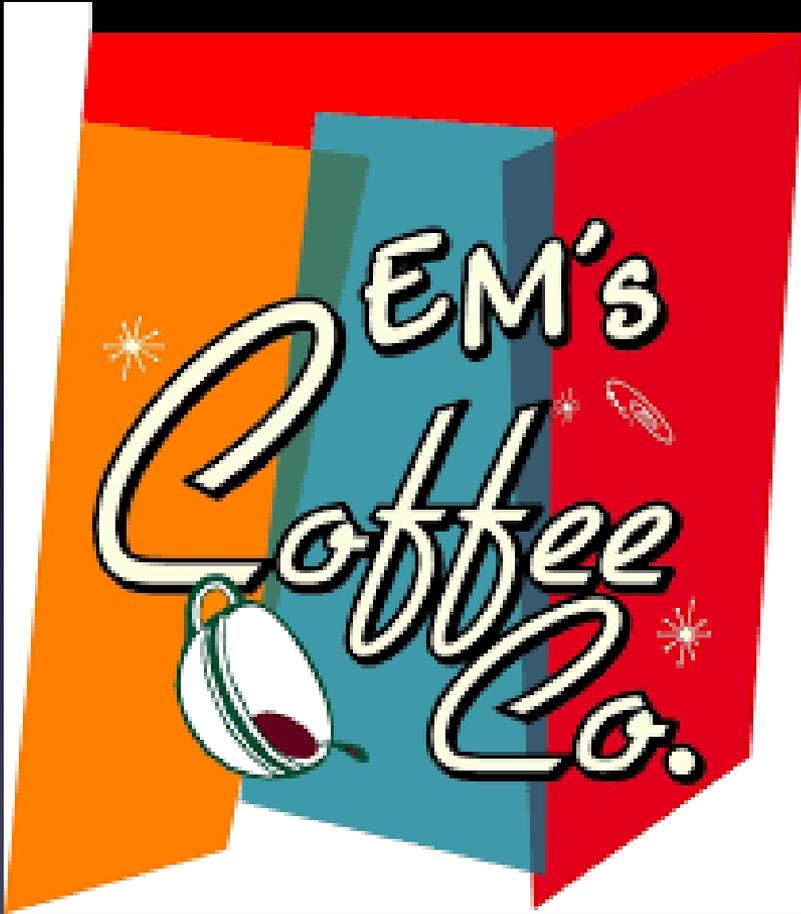
- Barista school in Minnesota
- Ice Cream scooping school
- Work with a marketing company
- Promote small town gossip
 - Announce at high school scholarship assembly
 - Tell everyone!



It takes a team



The story of Em's Coffee Co.





Em's Coffee Co.

- Before



- After



Em's Coffee Co.

T-Shirts



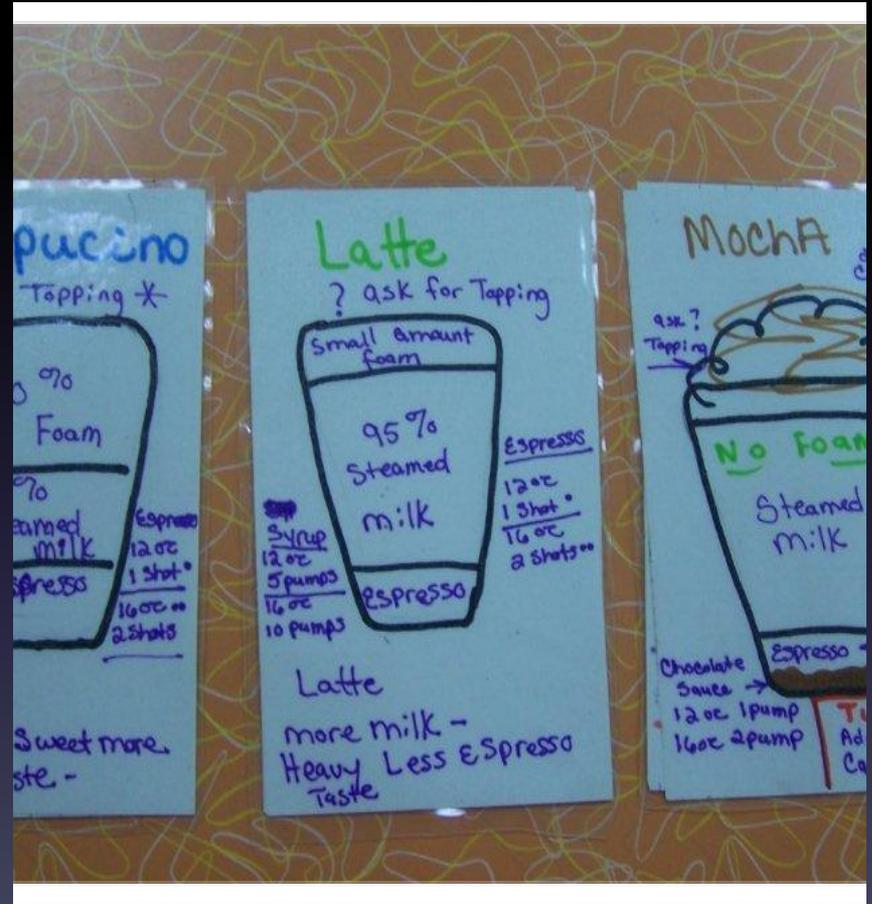
Cash register



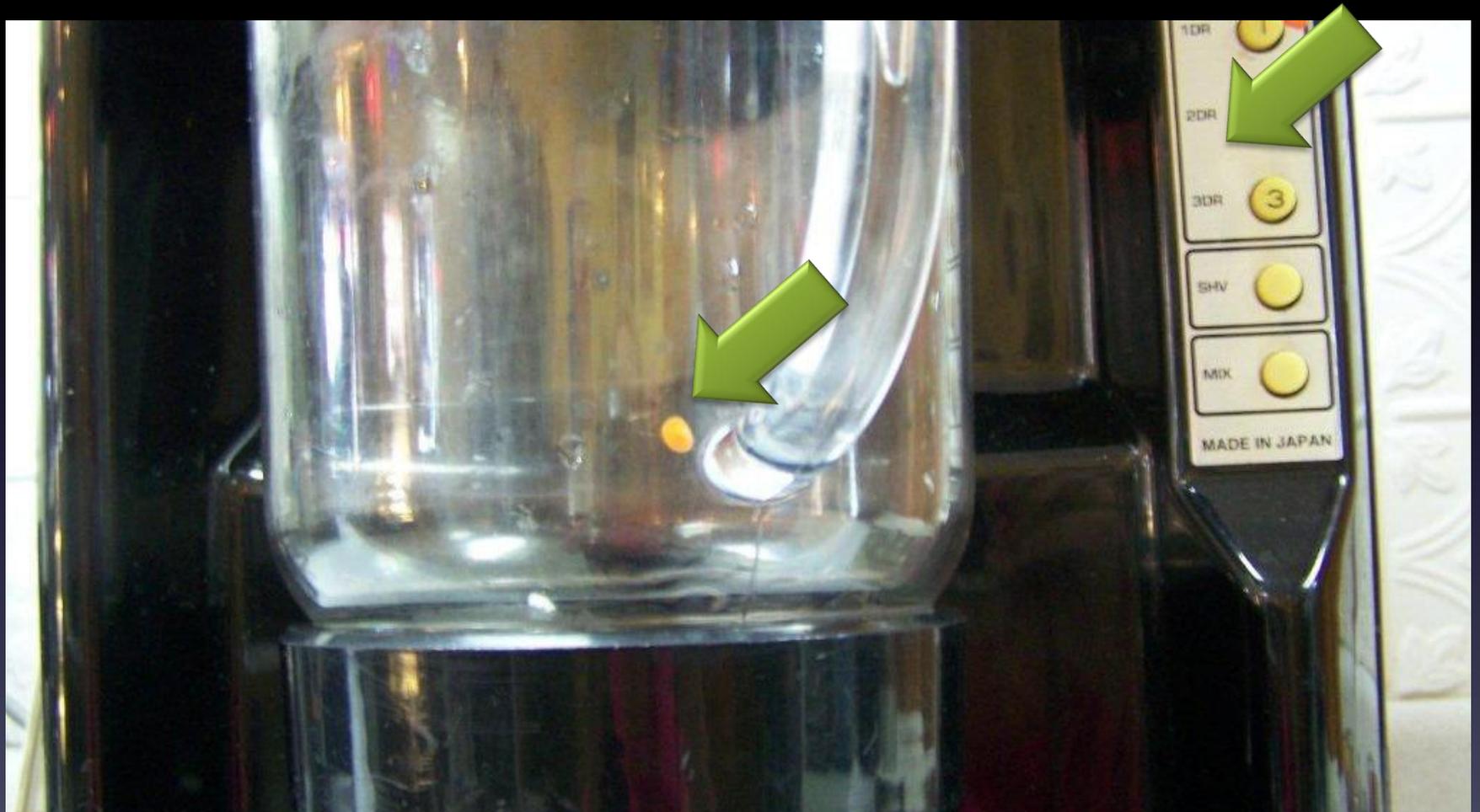
Espresso Machine



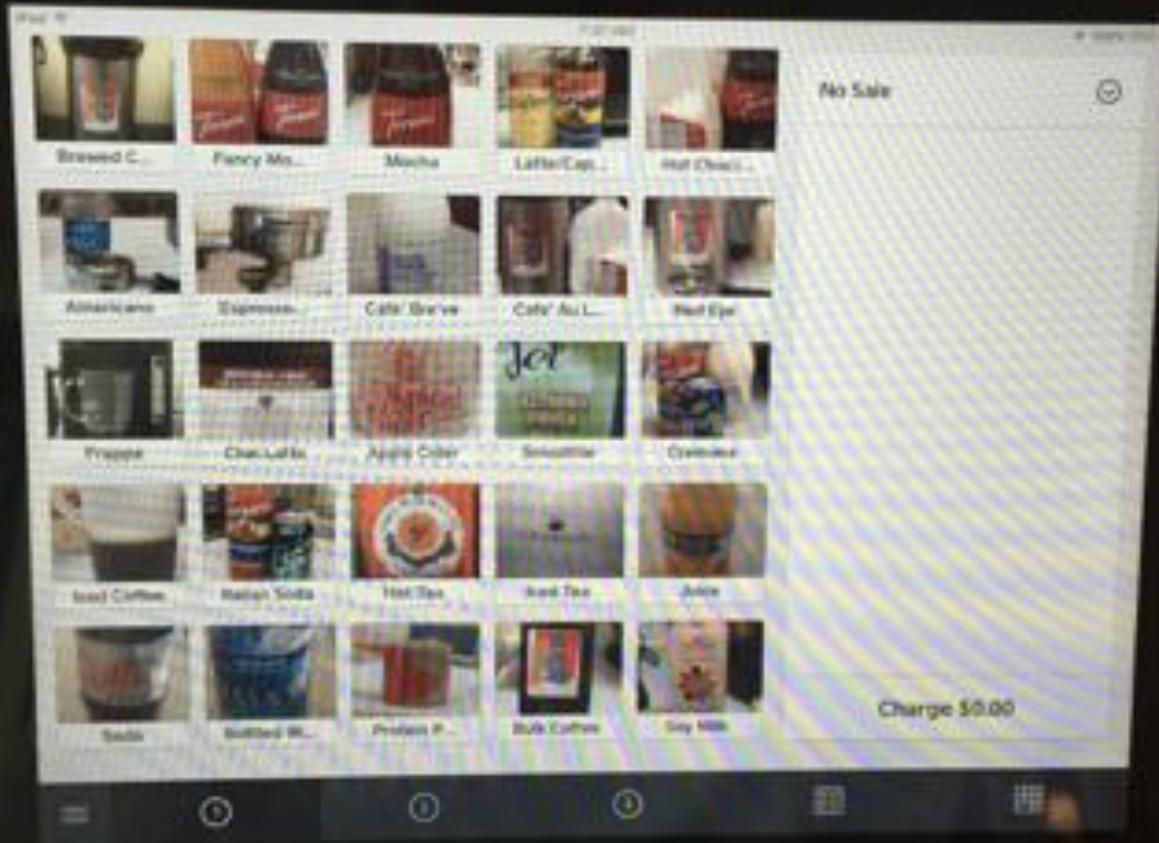
Grinder/flash cards



Smoothie Machine



Cash Register





Em goes to the
White House for
signing of WIOA



Em and The Clinton's



Thank You



"May All who enter as guests leave as friends"

"If you start with a secondhand business you treat people with disabilities as second class citizens"

Take Aways

- Be a regular in your community
- Find, connect and steward relationships with local champions
- Get to know someone in their environment
- Be self aware and put your predetermined ideas aside
- Work beyond what you know...we develop to what we know or have experienced and we miss out on the “unknown” ...where the cool stuff happens!

Take Away

- Individualized services makes a difference
- Customization works
- Engage families and friends
- The answer isn't a coffee shop for everyone
- Abide by the philosophy of anything is possible

Root disability employment in community →
everyone benefits

Rural inclusion = stronger economies, stronger
communities, stronger futures

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

- Albert Einstein

Thank you!

Follow us on Facebook at Em's Coffee Co.

www.emscoffeeco.com

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