

The Perch Episode 3: Cutting Class (8 minutes)

Mr. V: Hey Joel, how's it going bud?

Joel: Hey Mr. V. You ready for your haircut today?

Mr. V:

Yeah can you cut me up today? I just wanted shorter on the sides and cleaned around the ends and the back.

Joel:

Are you good with the taper? Yeah, sure.

Mr. V:

All right.

Cameron Pien:

It's a Thursday at lunch and senior Joel Tanoue is cutting a teacher's hair next to the bank of lockers in the bustling cafeteria, about a year ago to noise started giving free haircuts on the campus of Hawaii Baptist Academy. His clients range from students to teachers. And since beginning his business, which he calls JT Blendz, Tanoue had over 50 customers and cuts hair around twice a week.

Joel:

So I became interested in cutting hair after a series of bad haircuts from like the big haircut places like super cuts, great clips, fantastic Sams. And then I got a really good haircut from a proper barber shop. But I was like really expensive and not sustainable for me. So I figured I can probably do it myself for better and for free. I learned by watching YouTube videos on how to cut hair. So I decided to cut hair at school after I got good enough by cutting my own hair, so I wouldn't mess up my friend's hair because I wouldn't want to be that guy. Then I wanted practice to get better at cutting hair because I enjoyed the process of fading. And yeah, I thought school is a great place because I have a lot of friends that need haircuts.

Cameron Pien:

However, the early days of his endeavor were a little rough as he had to work out a deal with the school administration.

Mrs. Jeroldine Tsuha

Hi, I'm Jeroldine Tsuha, the VP for the high school at Hawaii Baptist Academy. So the first initially the very first time we caught him, we said you need to stop right away. And then he came up and talked to Mr Kinoshita and expressed that he would like to do that, too. He likes cutting hair, and he's looking for his future...he might want to be doing that. And so Mr Kinoshita and I talked about it and said, Well, if he does do that, then he would need to create a form that gives him consent from the student, and also their parents before he could do anything. And so

at that point, now he has a Google Doc, and he does get consent. Well, I know some of the adults on campus. So if you're 18 and over, you don't need consent, like some of the teachers have tried him out. But if you're under 18, then he does need it signed by their parents.

Cameron Pien:

Two loyal clients, seniors Chris Wu and Elijah Wong, have been supporting Tanoue since the start.

Chris Wu:

I think Joe is a very ambitious guy. The first time he did it, it was Elijah was in the yard. And I was like, Is this even allowed? I was like, really funny. So I was like, once he gets more experience, maybe I'll get a cut as well. My hair cut before used to be really bad. As like, since it was already bad. Like, why not? Yeah, it'll be fun.

Elijah Wong

He's a pretty good guy. No, he's always looking out for his boys. Yeah, he's been cutting my hair. Like I see like, every month, once a month, the first time I think he did pretty good. It wasn't like a cut that I got wouldn't like, go out with you know. It's gotten better, way better.

Cameron Pien:

Another one of his regulars, Mr. Charles Poore, is the Christian Ministries Director at the high school.

Mr. Charles Poore

I was in my office one day, and I hear this music playing. And I'm like, where's this music coming from? And I look outside my office and kind of right outside in the breezeway, where there's Joel cutting hair, and I'm like, interesting. I don't know how it started. But one day, I needed to get a hair cut, because I'm in the National Guard. And I have to have my hair at a certain way for when I go and do my National Guard weekends. And so one day I thought, or maybe somebody challenged me, I can't remember how it worked out. But I was like, I'll get up. I'll get a haircut from Joel. And so he cut it that day. And it, it looked really good. And so I've been back. In fact, yesterday, I was back getting another haircut from him because I had to have guard this weekend. So I needed to have my hair right. And so we even talked about the style that I wanted. I wanted to try the there's a new style. I don't know if it's new, but it's called a drop fade. And so Joel knew exactly what that was. And I'm like yeah, give me a nice drop fade. And so that's what he did shape me up. I look good, I think.

Cameron Pien:

Tanoue has multiple methods of advertising, some of which includes stickers and social media.

Joel:

So I advertise my business through...one is word of mouth, and then I decided to make stickers because I thought that'd be a great way because you know Everyone has a water bottle. And

water bottles have stickers. So I think that's like Perfect, great branding, it's free. And then also I make videos on Instagram. And that gets me people as well.

Cameron Pien:

Although Tanoue has been dedicated to cutting hair during high school, he doesn't currently plan to be a professional barber. However, he does see cutting hair as a useful skill and solid backup plan. And the experience has given him valuable insight.

Joel:

I learned that making your customer feel important and like they're not just another person in the chair. And then like also, like customer service is important. Making sure everything's clean, making sure they feel good. And then yeah, giving them a good product, a good haircut, I don't ultimately think I'll be a barber. But if I did go down that path, I do have a vision for it. So what I do is I get a barber van with a big JT Blendz logo on it. And then I go into the rich neighborhoods in a suit and find people that would pay me like 100 bucks a haircut, and then drive to them because they are business people are about time, time is money. So I save them time I give them a good haircut. And I'm also in a suit because I think cutting hair cut in a suit would be cool.

Cameron Pien:

Wherever Tanoue takes him, his willingness to pursue his passions and help others has made an impact on the school community.

Mr. Charles Poore

I think it's cool because you know, in certain cultures, like the barbershop is so important just to sit around and talk. And I think it allows a little bit of that interaction on a different kind of level for our HBA community, and then you know it helps our students around here. I don't know how much haircuts cost or how much our students normally pay for haircuts. But I think he just takes donations. So that's pretty cool too.

Cameron Pien:

Notably, Tanoue gives haircuts for free, a characteristic that he promotes in his branding.

Joel:

So my slogan is "passion over profit." And basically what I'm saying is that I'm not cutting hair for the money, because otherwise I'd be charging. I enjoy cutting hair. Because I play a big part in making my friends look their best feel good. have the power to make them feel confident. Give them a haircut that suits how they look like and it gives them confidence and happiness, and that makes me feel good.