

Corporate retailers can't just close for Black Friday. But co-ops can.

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

November 9, 2015

It's all over my Facebook newsfeed: some retail stores are bucking [the trend](#) and staying closed for Thanksgiving Day, and people—Christians and atheists, conservatives and liberals—are applauding them for it.

They're right. Retail workers ought to have the day off to be with their loved ones. The rest of us can go a day without shopping, even if it is one of the only days of the year we do any serious cooking anymore. This is a genuinely good thing Costco, T.J.Maxx, Sam's Club and others are doing.

But it's a pretty small good thing. The stores will open right back up the next day, massive retail day that it always is. Enjoy your day off, retail workers; see you back at the store tomorrow. Hope you have someone local to eat turkey with, cause you don't really have time to travel or anything.

Why not close Friday, too? We salaried day-jobbers will be off, enjoying our four-day weekend (three days for those of us who moonlight at churches). Don't retail workers deserve as much? Maybe so, but there are heaps of money to be made Friday, when America has finished giving thanks and has returned to buying stuff. [Closing on Thursday is an economically complicated move](#) but at a minimum a clear PR win. Closing on Friday just sounds crazy.

[REI is doing it anyway](#). The outdoor-gear retailer is closing both Thursday and Friday—and giving workers holiday pay. CEO Jerry Strizke says the company hopes people will instead spend some time actually being outside.

Another reason REI is doing this: because it can. [REI isn't a publicly traded corporation; it's a consumer cooperative](#). A publicly traded corporation is owned by shareholders, who may be lovely, ethical individuals but who as a group have a single interest: profit. REI is owned by its members (disclosure: I'm one of them, though I haven't had much need for new backpacking gear since the kids happened). So it has the freedom to do stuff like this, whether or not it helps the bottom line this quarter or next. Most big retailers are structurally incapable of

making such a decision. If they do something good for workers, it's because it's also good for business.

Corporate growth is so deeply embedded in Americans' understanding of the world we live in. We take as given that businesses are motivated almost entirely by profit, and that the benefit to actual humans relies on our interests—as customers or employees or shareholders—coinciding with their profits. REI's move is a good reminder that none of this is inevitable. Even in America, there are still other ways of doing business.