

Those of you who are long time readers might remember that five years ago I wrote about time I spent pulling weeds from my grass. Since that time we have employed a lawn service who had done a very nice job for us, until we decided to stop them for a while earlier this summer. We decided to stop for several reasons; lack of rain, excessive heat, too cheap to pay to water. For a long while it looked like a great idea as the grass and just about every other living thing went dormant.

Ever so slowly my yard is beginning to come back to life, but so have the weeds that I talked about five years ago. So when I mowed my yard last week, I stopped every so often to pull a weed that caught my eye. At one point the weeds were so plentiful that I stopped the mower and spent several minutes pulling what seemed like a multitude of weeds. Unlike five years ago it seems like there is a wider variety of weeds in my yard this year. And just in case you don't remember my primary theme from way back then it was "I HATE weeds". My feelings have not changed.

After I pulled the weeds from that particular section of grass, I kept mowing. Every now and then I would stop and pull a stray weed, and started feeling a little better about my grass. Then I noticed the unusually high amount of moths that were swirling around as I went back and forth across my lawn. The mental note I made was to have my wife call the lawn care guy and have him come take care of the weeds and the bugs.

Then, as I stooped over to pick another weed I saw something I have never seen in my grass, two little, green, slithering worm-like bugs. Update to the mental note: have my wife get the lawn care guy over here as soon as possible! Fortunately, I finished mowing the rest of the grass without incident. But I was able to make several observations. First of all the weeds tended to grow largest and with the longest roots wherever the grass was brownest. Second, the moths tended to be in the greenest, most healthy looking portions of the yard.

As small business owners and managers we also encounter weeds and bugs in our businesses. Weeds are people who do not support the company. Weeds are people who smile at you when you are talking to them, and then talk about you when you walk away. Weeds are people who gossip, find ways to avoid work or are simply mean to customers and co-workers. Weeds are only working for a paycheck, nothing else. The best way to get rid of weeds is to pull them out by the root and throw them away.

Bugs are those competitors who are trying to steal your best customers. Bugs fly in, lay their eggs, nibble at the good food and fly away for a while. Bugs compromise the good you do from the inside out. Bugs are harder to get rid of, and often you need outside help to do so.

The best defense against weeds and bugs is a strong, healthy lawn. We need to get rid of them as soon as we spot them. It involves work, possibly some pain and potentially some money. The best defense against weeds in the workplace is a strong, healthy company with management that cares. In the end it is worth it because those who remain will be stronger, healthier, more in tune with everyone else in your company. Just like my lawn will be better off in the long run.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.*