

When Mr. Robie at Parkview Middle School was looking for speakers to talk about their careers, I gladly answered the call. Partially because my son Ben was a student in one of his classes, and partially because I enjoy speaking about being a banker. Last Thursday I spent 3 hours telling 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders about careers in banking.

However I am not gifted enough to simply stand in front a group of kids and talk about banking without a little help. So I started to make an outline for my talk but the thought of listening to me talk for 45 minutes was boring even me. I needed even more help, so I sent an e-mail to our marketing department to see if anyone there had given a talk similar to this one. Fortunately a co-worker had saved their note cards from years ago and graciously lent them to me with only one caveat: don't lose them!

After reviewing the material given to me by Mr. Robie and my co-worker, the good news was that with minimal tweaking, I could make a power point presentation. It would add a little flair to the presentation and I would not risk losing the note cards. The first thing I decided to do was to look up the definition of a bank at dictionary.com. Much to my surprise, the first definition was: "–noun 1. a long pile or heap". While there are some days I feel that way about all banks, it was not the definition I was looking for. On the other hand, I decided to keep that definition, along with about 15 others that didn't describe a financial intermediary, to keep the presentation somewhat interesting.

The note cards were a tremendous help to me as they described in detail many of the job functions in the bank and the level of education that is typically required for each job. I had forgotten how many different types of jobs and different types of people work in our bank! As I read through presentation, I added pictures and cartoons to help overcome potential boredom. In the end I was pleased with the presentation.

When I asked Ben for his opinion two nights before my scheduled presentation, he gave his approval. When I asked him if there was anyone else who did something special, he mentioned that Bill Walljasper, CFO of Casey's General Stores brought in cookies. I like and respect Bill, so if he brought cookies, I should bring something too.

As owners and managers of small businesses we often need to make sales calls and sales presentations. Sometimes it feels like we know everything about our products and business so we don't spend any time preparing for what is arguably the most important activity in our business lives, sales! One of the sales gurus I follow is Jeffery Gitomer. In a recent column he wrote about the value of preparing to make a sales call. Just spending one hour doing research on your prospect can make the difference between becoming a valued vendor or ending up just like everyone else.

I am guessing that if you were going to make a presentation to three sections of Parkview students, you would spend more than an hour preparing, just like I did. Wouldn't it make sense to do the same for your clients and prospective clients?

After making those three presentations, I was exhausted. My already high respect for the people who spend time teaching my kids grew even higher. I was going to bring donuts, but decided cookies were much easier to carry into the building. Ben told me later that I didn't embarrass him, which was good. Then again, he didn't tell me that he now has an uncontrollable desire to be a banker either.

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