

Last weekend the girls in our family threw a bridal shower for daughter Katie, who is getting married in May. As a guy, I was pleased that I didn't have to go. An added bonus was that the entire family was home for at least a short while. Plus we got to meet one of Katie's friends from California, Gabby, who flew in for the party. Gabby had never been to Iowa before, and her only knowledge of Iowa has come from conversations with Katie.

Because the boys and I had a different schedule, we didn't get to spend much time with Gabby, which was too bad because she has a very interesting history, having emigrated from El Salvador when she was 5 years old. She is fluent in both English and Spanish and works as a nurse with Katie in California.

I am sure that Gabby had a good time here in Iowa, because when she left us to return to California, she created a "Top 10 List" of her reasons why she is coming back. She was kind enough to share her list with us, and allowed me to share it with you. I have included my commentary in parentheses.

10. Wide open spaces. (No explanation necessary)
9. The sweet corn she didn't get to try. (She was about 3 weeks too late)
8. CJ's Bagels (those of you who have tried this Ankeny delicacy, no explanation is necessary)
7. Katie's Iowa friends. (A great group of kids who have remained friends since high school)
6. Katie's wedding caterer. (I guess the samples they ate were crazy good)
5. Football and the changing trees. (She recognized how football crazy we are around here)
4. Joanne's notes (My lovely wife keeps us all organized by use of notes)
3. Emily's dog Lucy (Emily is my oldest daughter and her dog is a golden retriever/yellow lab mix. Technically Lucy is not an Iowa dog, as Emily lives in Kansas)
2. Funeral potatoes, or as Iowans call it – cheesy potatoes. (Joanne made these for supper one night and they were a very big hit)
1. The Friedman family! (In spite of my quirkiness, I have to admit that we can be a lot of fun)

So why am I telling you about a top 10 list made by a visitor from California? Why is this list relevant to small business owners and managers? Simply, I want people to make a top 10 list of reasons why they want to do business with your company. I want our businesses to have the kind of impact on people so that they take the time to actually write down reasons to come see you again.

I suggest you start with your employees and make a top 10 list. Start by listing as many reasons as you can, then once you run out of ideas, rank them. You will be surprised how many good ideas come out of this session. Now that you have identified the top qualities in your company, you need to make them even better. Make doing business with your company memorable.

The next time we see Gabby will be at Katie's wedding in May. I hope that her second trip to Iowa will be as good as the first one and she creates another list of reasons to visit Iowa again and again. Who knows, maybe we can talk her into staying here permanently!

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