

As I start my story today, I need to give you some background on the timing of when I write vs. when you have the first opportunity to read what I write. For publication on Tuesday, the paper has asked me to have my column submitted to them no later than the Thursday morning prior. For those of you counting, that is three business days, five days total between my deadline and publication. This is important because this story is about my son, Ted, and his graduation experience from Ankeny High School. Well, technically it's about my experience with his graduation.

In Ankeny, high school graduation tradition is for the graduate to have a party celebrating their accomplishments. As I have been to more than my fair share of parties, here are some of the constants: food, lots of food; a "wall of honor" loaded with pictures of the graduate through the years and awards won; scrapbooks; and of course a place for cards and gifts. My personal opinion, based on nothing more than my own observations, is that gifts are the main reason for having the party. So for the past few weeks we have been preparing for Ted's graduation party.

Fortunately, my wife has successfully planned three previous parties, which were successful, and for this one she has conspired with three other moms of graduates to work together on a joint gathering. My role in this exercise was limited to being "muscle" for Ted's wall of honor, delivering certain items and to scan pictures of him so a video can be made.

The first night I scanned in 69 pictures of Ted, his friends and our family. During the next scanning session, I think I got 80 more pictures in and during the final session I am guessing I scanned about 50 more. The scanning process was relatively easy and basically a task that took very little mental attentiveness. What I enjoyed was being able to look at pictures that I haven't seen in years. How the kids have grown and matured. How cheesy that mustache I had up until a few years ago had really looked cheesy. Looking at the pictures I couldn't help but smile as the memories came flooding back. Yes, I am a bit of a nostalgic.

As I was looking at the pictures, I was thankful for those who invented and perfected cameras and helped us to remember the past. I looked at the pictures chronicling Ted's young life and tried to put that into perspective of what was happening for Ted. He wasn't looking back; he was looking forward to the next phase of his life. As small business owners and managers, we always need to be looking forward, anticipating trends in our industries and anticipating what our customers and employees will want next. However, when we look forward, often it is helpful to look back.

Looking back too much can get us in trouble, because times do change. Remembering the basics of what made us successful is vital to our continued viability. Today, I challenge you to look back at the history and foundation of your company. What are the constants that haven't changed over time? The principles you always want to remember? Should you create your own "wall of honor" so that you always remember them? Something to think about.

I would love to tell you how the party turned out, and the impressive video my daughters made of the pictures I scanned. But the timing is not just right. Since this is a breakfast gathering on the Saturday before graduation, each mom is making 10 egg casseroles, 100 fruit cups, eight gallons of punch and 100 rolls. That is a lot of food! I just hope it is enough and it all gets eaten. We really don't want to remember all the leftovers.

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