

Loyal readers of this space will remember that we have been working on a landscaping project around our house for quite a while now. Whenever my wife Joanne and I had a few hours without interruption, we would make progress. In between the raindrops last Sunday, we were working on the last few pieces of the project. Once the rain started getting heavier, we decided that playing in the dirt was much more productive than playing in the mud and headed inside.

Joanne wanted to spray paint a couple of lawn decorations that she found. Our supply of spray paint was in a box on the top shelf of the garage, and in order for me to get it for her, I had to climb just a couple of steps and grab a light weight box. But I never got to the box.

I forgot that the shoes I typically wear to work outside are essentially throw away shoes. The tread that used to be on the bottom has long been worn off. Add the fact that the shoes were wet and muddy, with my higher than normal center of gravity and you can guess what happened next. Yes, I slipped off of the second step of the stepladder. All my weight headed toward the ground. If I had hit the ground, I think that might have hurt less. But I landed on the edge of a computer tower that we are trying to get rid of.

The good news is that I didn't hit my head, or re-sprain my ankle. I landed on my rib cage; landed so hard that the wind got knocked out of me. Words cannot adequately describe the sound that came out of my throat. It wasn't a cry, it wasn't a wail, but a cross between a moan and a whimper. Frankly it scared my lovely wife. Seeing the look on her face I told her that I wasn't really hurt, I just couldn't breathe. The words were only a cover of the incredibly odd noise that I continued to make.

Obviously I eventually caught my breath and we walked into the house to figure out what else might be hurt. I pulled up my shirt and Joanne told me that the bruising was already beginning. The rest of the night was painful, but I managed through it. On Monday I went to urgent care, just to make sure there was nothing hurt on the inside. The bruising on the outside was getting worse, but the doctor confirmed that the only thing hurt on the inside was my pride. He prescribed pain killers to help me get through the next couple of weeks.

My painful experienced happened because I didn't think safety first and was in a hurry to finish the job. Does that happen in your business? Some companies, such as construction or manufacturing companies display a sign showing how many days they have been accident free. Safety in other businesses isn't quite as obvious.

Accidents typically happen like they happened to me. A relatively simple, routine activity is done without any forethought and the next thing you know, bruised ribs, or worse. Sometimes people who take the time to think before they act are ridiculed, but in the end they are less likely to have accidents. My challenge to you this week is to encourage the people you work with to think before they act. Accidents can be avoided in every company if we encourage people to be careful.

It will be a while before I get up on another ladder with wet shoes. I was fortunate that I only fell from a couple of feet and ended up with bruised ribs. Just don't make me laugh or sneeze for a couple of weeks, it still does hurt. Maybe by then I will be healed enough to get back and finish that never-ending landscaping project!

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