

Our 22 year old daughter Jenni recently took a trip to Washington D.C. to visit a friend who was working there. Unfortunately things did not go quite as planned for her. Here is a compilation from her Facebook page:

“Day 1 – Zipper breaks on my suitcase at the airport prior to checking in for my 5:45 a.m. flight. No stores open to get a different one or able to fix the one I have; forced to buy a “glamorous” Southwest Airlines bag for \$25.

Day 2 – Got on a wrong bus at the airport in D.C., riding along and lost for 1½ hours. Started crying but the bus driver was able to help.

Day 3 – Took the Megabus to New York for the day. The taillights on the bus didn’t work so had to transfer buses, in the rain. Second bus had electrical problems on the whole trip. Not fun.

Day 4 – Got a call from my parents who were in Omaha for the day visiting relatives; heard there was a hail storm at the Omaha airport where my car was parked and they went to check it out. Major damage, including a smashed windshield, making the car un-drivable. “Tomorrow is a new day. Go ahead, hit me. I’m ready.”

While we were at the Omaha airport talking on the phone to Jenni, we were recounting her past four days and the problems she was having. While she normally does have an upbeat attitude, she did indeed have a string of unfortunate circumstances; I choose to try and help her see another side of her week. Being an optimist by nature, I told her that she was extremely lucky that Southwest had luggage to sell her, and frankly \$25 was not a bad price to pay. She might have had to pay more than that to repair her broken luggage or worse yet, miss her flight out of Omaha and then all the connecting flights.

I told her that she was really lucky to find a bus driver that was sympathetic to her being lost. He could have totally ignored her or let her off in an undesirable part of town. The Megabus ride could have been a lot worse, for example it could have been on the way to New York and she would have missed out on a fun day. Or the buses could have broken down completely, and they could have been stranded on the New Jersey Turnpike. Finally I told her how lucky she was that we happened to be in Omaha that day and hear about the hail storm.

We were able to call in a claim to the insurance company and because Joanne was able to drive back to Omaha a couple days later, the windshield was replaced hours before her plane landed. All in all, while her trip did have some bumps, those same bumps could have been a whole lot worse. In life, as it is in business, attitude is everything. At least three of the four problems that happened to Jenni were completely out of her control (getting on the wrong bus was probably her fault, but mistakes happen). Problems will happen in our businesses, sometimes they happen even though we plan carefully so they don’t happen. That is human nature.

If we take a defeatist attitude whenever a problem comes at us, we will run our companies right out of business. Nobody likes to do business with someone with a sour attitude, and most people are willing to help if given a chance. My challenge to you this week is to attack each problem with a positive attitude, then see if things overall are better. I am guessing they will be. Even Jenni’s Facebook post the next day was somewhat positive: “No disasters today!!!” Plus she missed the earthquake a few days later.

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