

A few weeks ago I was channel surfing and came across an old episode of the series “Leave it to Beaver”. I really enjoyed watching it and was reminded of my childhood growing up in Dubuque. Except I never saw the show during prime time. The show aired from 1957-1963 and I was born in 1959. But the show was in reruns during the 1970’s when I do remember watching. Back then, as I was also a younger brother, I identified with “Theodore Cleaver a/k/a “The Beaver”. And in case you happened to be wondering about my own son named Theodore, he was NOT named after the TV character.

In addition to the Beaver, the show had a great cast of characters including the ever-knowlegeable Ward Cleaver as Beaver’s father. June Cleaver, who almost always wore a dress and a pearl necklace, was the mother and Wally was the athletic and “babe magnet” older brother. Beaver was portrayed as a goofy yet likeable boy who seemed to find a different kind of trouble in every episode. There were other regular characters but the one that everybody remembers more than others is Wally’s best friend, Eddie Haskell.

Although I could write about many different aspects of the show, today I think I will take the easy way out and write about Eddie. Everyone has met or has a friend like Eddie Haskell. Eddie was overly polite to authority figures, and spoke to them in a completely unnatural tone. For example when he sees Wally’s mother, he will say something like “Good afternoon Mrs. Cleaver, my you look lovely. Is Wallace available?” Then when he feels he is safe from adults, will revert to his normal, disrespectful self. More often than not he is not safe from adults hearing him talk so he is embarrassed. Not about what he said, but about getting caught.

When I was in high school, I had a friend that my mom nicknamed Eddie Haskell. Overall, “Jeff” was a pretty good kid, but had a wild side. Always polite around my parents, he had a knack for getting in trouble. Jeff was the first person to introduce me to underage drinking. I had one beer in a car in a deserted parking lot, felt really guilty and didn’t do it again. He was always getting grounded for something or another, which made it difficult to double-date.

Because the show ended when Wally and Eddie graduated from high school, we don’t find out where Eddie ended up working as an adult. The key is keeping the Eddie Haskell types out of our workplaces. As owners and managers of small businesses, having an Eddie on our payroll is a problem. Eddie always agrees with our visions and the ways we lead, as long as we are within earshot. Like the original Eddie, as soon as they think we are not around, they try to undermine what we are trying to accomplish. The workplace Eddie Hasskells are not as easy to spot as the Eddie in the TV show. They are more sophisticated, more cunning and it takes more work to find them and rid them from your organization.

A lot of employees recognize Eddies for what they are, and do their best to ignore them. But what Eddie did so well on the TV show was to plant that little seed of doubt; make everyone think that our motives for helping our businesses succeed are not in their best interests. Of course Eddie is wrong, which is why the minute we are sure Eddie is working in our company, we have to get rid of him.

I will continue to look for more reruns of “Leave it to Beaver” and remember my own happy childhood. But in the back of my mind I will always keep an eye out for Eddie Haskell.

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