

When I graduated from high school I weighed 200 pounds. My weight when I graduated from college and got married four years later was 200 pounds. When we moved to Ankeny 17 years ago I weighed about 205 pounds. For a long time I accepted my weight, not necessarily with the distribution of that weight but accepting none the less. Over the last 17 years I have put on weight, not a lot, but enough that I could start to tell.

Lately my pants have been feeling a little snug and while I was working my way toward a workout plan, I injured my ankle playing volleyball. Seven weeks later, my ankle still isn't back to normal and is about the size of a grapefruit. Running isn't a viable option for getting back into shape and losing a few pounds. But my luck was about to change. A coworker was in the process of moving and did not have room for a Schwinn exercise bike and an elliptical machine.

We were in the process of participating in our neighborhood garage sale and I offered to help her get rid of both pieces of equipment as long as she was able to get them to my house. She also agreed to take them away if we could not get rid of them. My coworker did not want money for the equipment, as she got them free herself. My firefighter neighbor took the exercise bike for use for Ankeny firefighters, and all were happy with the outcome. The elliptical machine did not get taken by anyone at the garage sale.

When my boys saw that the elliptical was still in the garage after the sale, they were excited and wanted us to keep it. Since I was looking for a way to exercise without reinjuring or placing undo strain on my ankle, we decided to keep it for use in our house.

Since then I have had the opportunity to use the elliptical twice. Of course I haven't lost any weight or inches, but I did get two more workouts than I would have if we didn't have the machine. After each workout I was sweaty, stiff and had to spend several minutes stretching my hamstrings so I could walk up the stairs to take a shower. One thing I noticed is that my posture felt better. I also felt like I accomplished something.

As small business owners and managers it makes sense that the more fit your employees are, the better they will perform at their jobs. They will likely have more stamina, are less likely to become injured and in general think more clearly. I know that when I was regularly exercising all of these held true for me. So how do we help our employees become more fit? Some of the employers have gone as far as putting fitness equipment in their businesses so that employees can work out before or after work or on their lunch breaks.

If you can't afford to install a gym or fitness equipment, there are alternatives. Partnering with local fitness clubs and negotiating and/or supplementing discounts can be a win-win for everyone. Often if the employee has money at risk, they are more likely to stick with something that isn't quite as convenient. Even sponsoring a softball or any recreational team might help inspire people to become more fit. Investing in the health of our employees is a great investment.

By the time you read this I will NOT be down to the slim 200 pound guy that walked across that graduation stage. My goal is to lose 10 pounds by the time school starts and the next volleyball season comes around. Of course having my pants to fit just a little more loosely will be nice too.

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