

Once again this year we are celebrating Christmas on a day other than the 25<sup>th</sup>. The primary reason is that we want to celebrate with all of our kids present. Daughter Katie is working as a nurse in California and both her and her fiancé, Junior, needed to work on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Daughter Emily and husband Pete drove to Minneapolis to spend time with his family. Over the holidays our family enjoys playing board games when we are together. With the miracle of technology, we are actually able to include Katie and Junior, depending on what game we played.

Scattergories is a game that lends itself to being together over long distances via technology like Skype and iChat. If you are not familiar with the game, here is a brief synopsis: In the time allotted on a timer, typically 3 minutes, each player must attempt to think of and write down, a word or term that fits each of the 12 categories and starts with a letter that has been rolled on a 20 sided die. Any number of words in the answer is allowed, as long as the first word starts with the correct letter.

You score points when your answer is unique from everyone else's and the answer fits the category. And that is where potential conflicts (and fun) begins. Because people are trying to make their answers unique, some have been know to try and stretch the boundaries of the category. For example, there is one answer from years ago that lives in the annals of Friedman family lore. The answer was "lids", the category was "articles of clothing". The author of the answer argued that the term "lid" was slang for a hat. Other players wanted to deny the point because they thought that the author would never use the term in an everyday conversation.

The "discussion" of the validity of my answer that day went on several minutes. I gave examples of slang terms that had been previously awarded points and how the rules didn't mention anything about not using slang. The other side argued that using slang was no different than using a foreign language, which is against the rules. As is the rule in the game, the awarding of the point was up for a vote. And even though I thought it was a great, creative and totally appropriate answer, I was denied.

"Lids" is often a topic of conversation and I get teased for the unique attempt. My only disappointment was that I didn't argue my case well enough. Regardless of what our business or occupation is, we eventually have to sell something to someone else in order to stay in business. Rarely do we have such a great product or service that it sells itself. Most of the time we have to present the merits of what we have, and convince the potential buyer that not only do they need what we have to sell, but is it also a better value for their money than any of the other alternatives.

How well prepared are you for the discussion of your product to potential buyers? Can you defend your position well enough to make the sale? Do you know the strengths and weaknesses of your product and can you offer solutions that help your customer make more profits? These are questions for which you need to have answers on the tip of your tongue so you can have an effective discussion. The only vote that counts is that of the customer, and they vote with their dollars.

As we get together for our late Christmas celebration our whole family will be together and will likely play games, maybe even Scattergories. As usual I will try to be creative, think of words that push the boundaries and this time I will be ready for the "discussions" that will follow. Wishing you a prosperous new year!

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