

Now that the weather has cooled some, vacations are completed and there seems to be just little bit more time available, we have decided to start a landscaping project at our house. Actually this project has been in the making for over a year, I have been dragging my feet because even though I have lived all my life in Iowa, I am not the kind of guy who likes to play in the dirt. We are replacing our 15 year old lawn edging and the weed mat underneath 16 tons of river rock.

Fortunately my wife does like to play in the dirt and we work pretty well together. I do most of the heavy lifting and she works at the finesse parts of the job. Part of the job was to remove and replace several bushes that had become overgrown. One of the bushes, which I think is called a barberry, has a lot of thorns that are particularly adept at penetrating soft, banker hands.

In attacking the disposal of this miserable plant, I decided to work at it from the top down. I took my electric hedge trimmer and started hacking away until I my hedge trimmer got to branches so thick they clogged it. Then I got busy with my shovel and axe. After working hard at the remnants of the barberry bush for 20 minutes I was able to extract the root ball from the ground. I was victorious over a gnarly, overgrown and potentially dangerous being that has caused me pain over the last 15 years.

Unfortunately the thorny aftermath was not going to go its eternal reward without inflicting damage along the way. Both my wife and I ended up with painful slivers in our hands. Not big thorns, but annoying, small, almost microscopic pieces of wood. Apparently the slivers in my hands were not as deep as those in my wife's. I was able to remove the splinters from my own hands without too much pain or trouble. Those in my wife's hand were another story.

Being the brave sole that she is, she enlisted my help to extract the two little troublemakers that remained buried slightly under her skin. With a safety pin and a tweezers along with some well-placed thumbs to squeeze the affected area, I was able to get the slivers out of her hand. She didn't even cry!

As small business owners and managers, every day we are confronted with little irritants that can make it difficult for us to focus on the important items. The way I see it we have several choices when this happens; a) immediately deal with the irritant and dispose of it so that we can focus on what matters, b) try to ignore the irritant and continue on as if nothing is bothering you, c) whine and carry on without doing anything to deal with the irritant, trying to get sympathy from those around you.

Actually there is no universally correct answer to the situation. Unfortunately, too often we choose option c. If we have too many distractions, and dispose of them right away, at the end of the day we might feel like we accomplished a number of tasks, but accomplished nothing that really matters. Ignoring the irritants simply makes it miserable to do our jobs, and that is no way to spend 40+ hours a week.

As we continue the landscaping project, we are thinking about replacement bushes, we are in agreement that we will not be buying any bush with thorns. Ideally it will be one that is inexpensive, and requires very little care by someone who really doesn't care for playing in the dirt.

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