

I don't think I look like a terrorist, if a terrorist has a certain look. But apparently the police at the United States Capitol think I might be capable of doing something very dangerous. Let me explain. A couple of weeks ago I had the privilege of accompanying 190 business, government and community leaders to Washington DC. The purpose of the trip was to engage our elected officials and promote economic development for Ankeny and Central Iowa.

While we were working the majority of the time, there was a little time available for sightseeing. A group of us decided to take a tour of the Capitol Building, and that is where I ran into the Capitol Police. Security is considerably tighter in Washington than in Ankeny, and I should have remembered that, but I didn't. So I do take responsibility for my own actions.

I went through security at the Des Moines International Airport and had no issues. I went through security at the Rayburn office building, where a large number of the House of Representatives have their offices, and had no issues. I went through security at the Hart Senate Office Building and had no issues. So I thought nothing of taking my money clip, along with its dull, chipped 1 ½ inch knife and file into the Capitol, and had issues. The Capitol police said that "weapon" was against the rules, and I had to throw it away outside.

Not wanting to make the rest of the group wait and not wanting to make a scene, I walked outside as directed, with my contraband. The first thought that went through my head was to hide the money clip under a bush so that I could retrieve it after my tour. Heading toward the nearest bush, other Capitol policemen stopped me in my tracks. The only option I would have with my dangerous money clip was to throw it away. They did tell me that I could dig through trash later, if I was so inclined. I was not so inclined.

I have carried a money clip for the better part of 32 years. The first one I received was a present for being in a good friend's wedding in 1981. Unfortunately, I lost that one about 8 years ago and was almost heartbroken. Another friend had several that were similar and offered an identical replacement to me, and it made my day. To have to throw out my money clip put a cloud on an otherwise great experience. I found myself constantly checking my pocket to make sure the little bit of currency I had was still there.

As small business owners and managers it is important to have consistency in how you deal with the public. It is especially important if you have multiple locations. If my money clip had been confiscated at the airport, or the Rayburn building, or even the Hart building, I think I would have understood.

No matter how you feel about McDonald's restaurants, they have done a nice job of providing a consistent product and consistent experience, no matter where you are in the world. Our job is to make our products, our client experiences consistently great, so they want to return again and again.

The next time I go to Washington DC I will remember to take a money clip that the Capitol Police do not consider a weapon. And I will try not to look like a terrorist.

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