

While I have an account on Facebook, I have never posted anything and do not check it every day. For me, Facebook is not the great social media boom that it is for others. I do not comment on other people's posts and relatively speaking, I do not have very many Facebook friends. But the other day I did check Facebook and found a post that was interesting.

There was a picture of a son of one of Joanne's nieces on a basketball floor with future University of Iowa basketball player Mike Gesell. In the picture Gesell was an official for a youth basketball game where the young boy was playing. The post was showing excitement that one current really good basketball player was on the same court with a potentially good basketball player.

Since I was looking at Facebook on my smart phone, I took the opportunity to use that picture as a teaching opportunity for my sons, especially 17 year old Ted. If you don't know about Ted, he is also a high school basketball player, except Ted is 6'9" tall, which makes him stand out more in a crowd. Like Gesell, Ted also works occasionally as a youth basketball referee.

My conversation with the boys was that simply by the fact that they are in the public eye, people will be watching what they say, what they do, how they act and more importantly how they treat people. Especially people they might not know well. They have been blessed with gifts that others would love to have. With those gifts comes responsibility.

The same theory holds true for small business owners and managers. We have been blessed with the opportunity for leadership in our companies. There is an old saying that character is what we do and how we act when nobody is watching. The problem is in today's world, there is always somebody watching, especially with the many social media outlets.

Most of the time we are the face of our companies and what we do, good, bad or otherwise reflects on our company. This poses an issue for us, because sometimes we want to let our hair down and maybe act a little crazy, which is OK. Before the days of social media, when we acted a little foolish, only the people who were at the scene were able to retell the story. But with Facebook and other social media, pictures of us acting a little crazy can show up for the whole world to see.

Our reputation is one thing that we can control and the one thing that is hard to change for the better once you damage it. We have to take care of it not just for our own good, but for the good of our businesses. Not very many of us will ever play basketball for the Iowa Hawkeyes, be 6'9" tall or give speeches before the entire school, but we all make impressions on others.

You can have your picture taken with a budding basketball star or a drunk while tailgating, either way, just remember that you are always representing not only yourself, but your company.

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