

One of the activities that occupy most every Tuesday and Friday nights from late November through early March is watching the Ankeny High School boy's basketball team. I am fortunate that my son Ted has an opportunity to be a part of this team. Ted is one of 21 boys on the varsity team and from what I can tell, they all get along very well.

Like many basketball teams, there is a wide variety of personalities, height and abilities. Of the 21 boys on the team, 11 are seniors, 8 are juniors and there are 2 sophomores. Unfortunately the Iowa High School Athletic Association only allows 15 boys to wear a uniform, leaving 6 not able to wear the Ankeny colors during any particular game. The other problem is that the game is played with only 5 of those 15 players on the floor at one time. This poses a potential problem for the team, coach, players and their parents. Everyone wants to be a part of the team, and everyone wants to contribute to the success of that team.

As I write this, the season is approximately one fourth complete, the team is winning and currently ranked number 5 in the state. Whether they deserve that high ranking or not is going to be determined as the season plays out, but the team is playing well and according to my son, they are all having fun. The good news so far is that it appears that every one of the boys understands the special part that he plays on the team. Some of them are starters, some of them contribute to the team as reserves and some contribute by being part of the scout team for practice.

During a pre-season meeting for the parents, Coach Petersen told us that 21 boys were more than a lot of schools keep on a basketball team, but that each one of the boys understands his role on the team and how they as individuals contribute to the success of the entire team. That is really important, because unless everyone from the coaches to the managers has that understanding, problems could arise. On the other hand roles can change and every player has to be ready.

The same is true in any business that has more than one employee. Every person in your organization contributes something of value or they wouldn't be a part of your team. Do they understand what they contribute? Do you as an owner or manager of a small business understand not only what each one of your employees contributes today, but the potential of what they could contribute in the future? Those are hard questions for any small business and they become even harder in difficult economic conditions.

This is the time of year when a lot of annual performance reviews are completed. If you are in the process of completing this task, it is a perfect time to talk about not only how everyone is performing but their role in the company, how they contribute to the overall success. It is also important to talk about other roles they might be able to fulfill.

On Tuesdays and Fridays I cheer the players on the floor every game and their accomplishments. But I also cheer and admire the boys who might not get to play in the game or even wear the uniform. Their hard work and dedication and off the court leadership does certainly contribute to the success of the team.

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