

Basketball season is in full swing. Between son Ted, a senior playing for Ankeny High, and Ben, a freshman playing for Ankeny Centennial, I get to watch a lot of basketball. And I enjoy every minute of it! My favorite place to watch a basketball game is not from the stands, but from the scorer's table. It is the closest, most unobstructed and most interactive spot. In addition to getting to know the officials, you are close enough to hear what the coaches and players are saying. But with the best seat in the house comes responsibility. You have the responsibility to be the official timer for the game and to make sure the right score is showing at all times, and that is where most people say no thank you.

When you make a mistake, everyone can see it. Plus, it is easy to get caught up in being a parent or a fan and forget to start or stop the clock or worse yet, forget to give one team or the other credit for scoring. A lot of people want to sit at center court next to the teams. Not everyone wants to do what it takes to sit there.

When I am running the scoreboard, most recently for Ben's freshman home games, I like to add touches that others might not add. For example, when a player commits a foul, in addition to increasing the team fouls by one, I like to show how many fouls the individual player has committed. Doing that takes a little more time, a few more buttons to push and more chances to make mistakes. Fortunately, I have been doing this long enough that I understand the key to being good at working the scoreboard is to not get too caught up in the game, listen for the referee's whistles and communicate with the official scorer.

The official scorer sits right next to the timer and even though everyone can see the scoreboard, the official score is on the paper used by the scorer. Communication between the timer/scoreboard operator and the official scorer is critical. Communication between the scorer's table and the officials is critical. In short, the most important facet of sitting in the best seat in the house is communication.

The same holds true for those of us who are small business owners and managers. Being good at sitting in what some would call the best seat requires outstanding communication. If you look at the very best presidents and famous CEO's, one common denominator is their ability to communicate, get their messages across. Communication has multiple parts; listening and understanding are probably the most important. There is an old saying that there is a reason God gave us two ears and only one mouth.

So how do you know if your communication skills are where they should be? Sitting at a basketball scorer's table is not an option for most of us. I did a quick Google search and found many online tools to test communication skills. Some were helpful, some not as much. My opinion is that if you are aware of what you are trying to communicate and who you are trying to communicate with, it will come easier. It doesn't matter if it is written, verbal or non-verbal.

Apparently, my desire to be a scorekeeper has rubbed off on my sons. Ted works part time for Ankeny Parks and Rec department keeping score at men's league games. Ben has started keeping the clock for various tournaments around town. From the reports I get they do a pretty good job. They must like sitting in the best seat in the house, and I hope it improves their communication skills.

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