

It has been almost a year since “the wave runner incident”, and I think I have emotionally healed enough to tell you the story. Joanne’s brother, affectionately known as “Uncle Ted”, as to not be confused with our son “little” Ted, has a timeshare at Lake Okoboji and most generously invites his family to join him. Since Joanne has been going to Okoboji since she was a little girl growing up in Sioux City, the lake holds special memories for her that she likes to share with the rest of us. We have also grown to enjoy our time with her family at the lake.

Over time we rented various watercrafts to further enjoy the lake, until Uncle Ted spent some of his hard earned money and bought a 3 person wave runner last summer. For a while we glided along the surface of the water enjoying riding on the wave runner. We then figured out that the wave runner could tow a tube and give others a ride. So on the first day of our vacation, little Ted, one of his many cousins and I set out with the wave runner and a tube for a little fun on the water.

We were cautioned by some of the family to be careful with the tow rope and of course I thought we were being careful. As we were switching riders on the tube and me at the controls, we got the tow rope caught in the driveshaft of the wave runner. I knew what had happened as soon as the engine died and my heart sank into the pit of my stomach. Being naïve, I jumped in the lake and tried to pull the tow rope free. No luck. So we flagged down a passing boater and talked them into pulling us into shore.

Once there I had to explain to Uncle Ted what had happened. We pulled the wave runner up onto a slip and again tried to free the rope, again to no avail. Partially because the working space was so very cramped, and partially because we didn’t have the right tools. Pliers didn’t work. A knife didn’t work because we did not want to scratch the drive shaft. Then one of our party had the great idea that we could turn the wave runner over and work on the rope from the top down instead of the bottom up. So we worked that stupid rope for a long, long time.

Eventually the rope was freed! When we went to start the motor, it was unresponsive. Someone told us it was because the motor was exposed to the water too long, someone else told us the battery was shot. So we bought a replacement battery and dried out the motor and again, the motor would not start. Eventually Uncle Ted took the wave runner to a local dealer to see if they could fix the problem. It turns out that there was a piece of rope still caught in the driveshaft that we couldn’t see and the engine was ruined. They told Uncle Ted that if he would have brought the wave runner in right away, they could have easily removed the rope and saved the machine.

As small business owners and managers it is our responsibility to make sure that we understand when we can solve our own problems and when we need help.

Often we feel we will save a lot of money if we can just do it ourselves. Often it turns out that we spend a lot more time and money if we would have just called in the experts early on. We need to surround ourselves with vendors who will give us honest answers as to when we should try ourselves and when it makes sense to use them.

Later in the summer, Uncle Ted talked to his insurance company who covered most of the repair of the wave runner. He plans on bringing it back to Okoboji again in 2011, but I am not sure if he will ever let me drive.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny. You can view past columns at www.fnbrates.com, under the “Business” button at the top of the screen then look under “FNB Extras”.