

As many of you know, my 16 year old son Ted has been blessed with above average height, a decent amount of basketball ability and the desire to use both of those gifts. Ted has had some good opportunities because he has been able to play varsity basketball as a freshman and again as a sophomore. Actually he got to start and play a lot of minutes in most of the games both years.

Ted has been lucky to be surrounded with good players and good coaching in the first two years of his high school career. In the past few weeks the Ankeny High School boys basketball team accomplished something every high school team in Iowa wants to accomplish, they made it to the state tournament at Wells Fargo Arena. Of course you want to win all your games, but I felt the first one was the most important because if you win that one, you get to play two more no matter what.

Ankeny's first game was against Sioux City East, who had one player 7'1" tall and another player who was 6'11" tall. Our tallest player, Ted, stands 6'8" tall and the big question was how Ted was going to do against players that tall. I was nervous, and I wasn't even playing! Unfortunately Ted got into foul trouble and only played 7 of the 32 possible minutes. The good news is that Ankeny won, and got to play again.

The state semifinal game was a close one, and Ted played better than he did in first game. He didn't get his second foul until a minute into the second quarter, still too soon for my liking. He got two more fouls and played a long time with four fouls, and he played pretty well. With the score tied and 3:23 left in the game Ted received his fifth and final foul of the game. Every Ankeny fan I have talked with thought Ted got the short end of the officiating. But to his credit, Ted didn't pout, didn't hang his head. Instead he became the head supporter of the team.

He was the first one cheering a good Ankeny play. He was the first one off the bench during time outs, congratulating his teammates for their efforts and encouraging them to do even better. He was dying to get back on the court but knew he didn't have a choice; he was going to have to do his part for the team from the bench. I have seen Ted play hundreds of basketball games in his time, and I was never prouder of him than I was that night. His basketball playing was average, but his attitude was outstanding.

As small business owners and managers we do not normally operate our businesses by ourselves. We have others that support us in our quest toward profitability. How encouraging is your staff toward the rest of the team? Is everyone on your staff a team player, or are they in it for themselves? It is our responsibility to create an environment that not only rewards the top performers, but also those who support and help the top performers achieve their success.

Ankeny ended up losing that semifinal game, despite the best efforts of everyone on the team. They went on to play in the consolation game and won in overtime. Ted played a lot better in his final game of the year and stayed out of foul trouble. The team loses several key seniors, but should be pretty good again next year. I hope they get back to "The Well", play together as a team and encourage each other to do their best.

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