

At one point, we subscribed to or received a free subscription to Parents Magazine. I never did read very many articles (fill your own joke in here), but there was one cover story that caught my eye. It was titled: "Is 7 the perfect age?" While I don't remember very much of the article, the author was theorizing that seven was the perfect age because the child was gaining an understanding of the world while still retaining childlike innocence. I disagree, and let me give you an example.

A few weeks ago I was in the local Panara Bread establishment having a breakfast meeting. While we were there, window washers were cleaning the outside of the glass. There was nothing remarkable about the way they were doing their job; applying the cleaning solution with a cloth-like tool, then using a squeegee to wipe the window clean. Finally touching up each window with a soft rag. I was paying attention to the other person in my meeting but would occasionally get distracted by the movement, until the cleaners worked their way closer to the side of the restaurant where we were sitting.

On the inside of the restaurant were two young boys. To say they were watching the window washers would be a gross understatement. Every move, every wipe, every drop of soap brought a squeal of excitement from them. They were simply amazed that someone would deliberately make a window "dirty" and then magically make it clean. They danced, cheered and clapped with every movement. Each boy getting the other excited with his own excitement. Both of us at the table stopped what we were doing to watch the boys watch the window cleaners. The men cleaning the windows periodically smiled at the boys but kept on working.

After a short while an embarrassed grandfather found the boys and apologized to us for the boys' behavior and tried to corral them back to their own table on the other side of the restaurant. We assured the grandfather that the boys were doing no harm, and in fact were very well behaved in spite of their excitement with the window washing. After a short while of watching with them, the grandfather coaxed the boys back to the rest of their own group.

I told my breakfast companion that I sometimes wished I was that age again, full of wonder and excitement with everything in the world. Then the thought hit me, how can we instill that type of enthusiasm into our own jobs and workplaces? Sometimes our jobs might appear boring to us because we do them all the time. To others, every time we move or say something, it is extraordinary. As small business owners and managers, our ideal work place would include a lot of excitement and people taking enormous pride in every aspect of their jobs, from the most exciting to the most mundane. Every job, every task is important, or we would waste time and money doing it, right?

This is not to say we won't make mistakes or make changes to the way we do business, but if our teams are passionate about where they work and the work they do, customers will forgive. More importantly they will tell their friends about our passion and that will increase our business.

On the way out of the restaurant, I asked the grandfather how old the boys were. They were both three. I have come to the conclusion that there is no perfect age for anyone. But everyone still has that three year old wonderment inside, we just have to provide an environment that fosters it and combines it with the excitement of doing our jobs extremely well.

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