

Who is your competition?

2/1/2011

When I sit down to write every other week, I try to think about what is happening in my world so that I can share it with you. Lately all my free time has been taken up with basketball. If I am not watching son Ted and the Ankeny High team compete in the CIML, I am either watching or coaching my 7<sup>th</sup> grade son Ben compete in AAU games. When I have the privilege of coaching Ben, I also get to coach a group of his friends called the Ankeny Destroyers.

When we put this team together several years ago we had 3 criteria, in this order: first we were looking for good kids; second we were looking for good parents and the final criteria was that they were basketball players. We are not the best basketball team in town, but the kids pay attention, play the game the right way and have gotten pretty darn good, despite the coaching. Because of the amount of teams in Ankeny and the demand for gym time is so great, we have to share gym space when we practice, and we never know who will be using the other half. Every now and then I will tease the boys and tell them we are going to scrimmage the other team. A few weeks ago a 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls team called the Ankeny Starzz were the other team sharing the gym.

I watched them practicing for a while and know several of the girls and their parents, and quickly realized that they were a very good basketball team, so I asked the coach if they would like to scrimmage. She agreed and when I told the boys about it they thought I was teasing them again. I finally convinced them it was really going to happen, and they all got a little nervous and worried.

The girls were not afraid of physical contact and like I said earlier, they are a very good team. When one of my players came out of the game for a substitute, in between heavy breaths he looked at me and said “those girls are tall... and fast... and good!”

When our allotted time had expired, the coach and I talked about the scrimmage and if it was beneficial to either team. I knew it was good for our team because the girls presented challenges that we haven't seen on the basketball court, and not just the obvious ones. The girls coach thought it was beneficial for the same reasons. I know the kids enjoyed because I found out they were talking positively about it at school the next day.

When I talk to entrepreneurs wanting to go into business for themselves or read a business plan for a new business I always take the time to look at what they say is the competition. If they say there is not competition because the product or service is so unique, I always question them further. Somebody, somewhere has to offer something similar. In this internet age, there is always competition, whether we realize it or not.

This week I challenge you to look at who your competition might be in a new way. Look at anyone who might do something similar and try to learn from it. You might find a new source of sales yourself!

We have scrimmaged the girls several times since that first day. Each time we try to bring something new into our game because it is a good time to work on it against a quality opponent that we will not see anywhere else. Plus it might help us look better against them. Now when Wednesday rolls around and there is a possibility of a scrimmage, there is a group of 7<sup>th</sup> graders looking forward to basketball practice.

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