

In keeping with my theme of spring cleaning from the last time we were together, the weather a couple of weekends ago sparked another round of spring cleaning activities in my brain. That and the fact that you could barely see through a couple of the windows in our house because they were so dirty. So I gathered the Windex, a small bucket of soapy water and a handful of rags and started to work. There are 19 windows in our house, all of the double-hung variety, 9 upstairs and 10 on the first floor. The upstairs would be the most difficult because I don't own a long enough ladder and didn't want to bother any of my neighbors by borrowing one.

I decided that because the windows were double hung, I could remove the screens then maneuver the top and bottom portions so that all corners of the glass could be reached. I started in the master bedroom, mainly because I could turn on the TV while I worked. The window screen came out very easily and I was careful not to drop it because the 2 story fall would likely break beyond repair. Soap and water worked pretty well and got most of the hard core "gunk" off. Then it was time to make it sparkle with the Windex.

In keeping with my theme of getting the hardest part done first, I dropped with the top window, which is also the furthest toward the outside. I reached up from the opening on the bottom aimed the Windex right at the window and squeezed the trigger. Unfortunately my aim was a little off and while some of the spray did hit the window, the rest of it hit me right in the eye! Much to my own surprise, I didn't panic. I quickly wiped off the excess from my face and got a clean wet rag to put on my eye.

It is amazing the thoughts that cross your mind when something like this happens. The only thing I could think of was the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". In that movie, the father of the bride believes that Windex is a remedy for just about everything. He sprays it on burns, scrapes, and claims it can cure the common cold. My thought was if it could cure a cold, it certainly couldn't hurt my eye. Plus I now probably have the cleanest contacts around! The Windex event was not enough to keep me from my appointed task, but I was much more careful as I worked on the remaining windows.

When I first thought about cleaning the outside of the upstairs windows without a ladder, I imagined myself sitting on the sill with my upper body outside and my legs inside for balance. At 52 years old, I am not as skinny, nimble or courageous as I used to be. So I ended up finding out that my arm is almost the perfect length for reaching the corners of our windows. More on that later.

With the beautiful day, I was determined to get all the windows in the house clean. After seeing the difference between the cleaned windows and the ones that were yet to be done, I knew I had no choice but to keep going. I was able to literally visualize the end result of my work. As owners and managers of small businesses, we often enlist the help of our employees to utilize their expertise in getting a certain job accomplished. Too often they see only a piece of the puzzle.

Today I offer to you that employees will perform better, be happier and contribute ideas for improvement if they are able to see how what they do contributes to the end product.

I finally finished the 19th window around nightfall. The next day in the shower I noticed a huge bruise on my right bicep, just another reminder of the job well done. And a reminder that the next time the weather is perfect, I should go golfing.

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