

When I was mowing the lawn the other night the sights and smells of the night took me back 40+ years to when I was in 8th grade playing real organized baseball for the first time. It was in the Holy Name Baseball League in Dubuque. As an 8th grader I was one of the younger kids in the league, but I remember being so very proud to be wearing the old, wool uniform representing Nativity School.

Compared to a lot of the other, older guys, I really wasn't very good. But I loved playing the game. After so many years, I distinctly remember the first time I faced the best pitcher in the league. Playing at the Loras College field, I saw three curve balls that made me dive to the dirt each time, and I was struck out. Not a very solid start to my baseball career. But over time I gained more experience and I improved.

Now my memories are a little blurry, so please forgive me if I am not 100% historically accurate. Back in the 1970's the Dubuque Telegraph Herald was delivered in the afternoon. In the evening, I remember reading through the sports pages and finding the box scores from the Holy Name Baseball league. There, in glorious black and white, showing as having played for Nativity School, was my name. As far as I know, that was the very first time my name, representing something that I did, ever appeared in print. It was a good feeling that I will never forget.

When I started working and got my first promotion from Toy National Bank, my picture and my new title ran in the Sioux City Journal. My wife cut the article out and it is still stored in a box somewhere around our house. We were both proud of my accomplishment. I once had a boss that said, with his tongue firmly in cheek, "Any publicity is good publicity, as long as it isn't associated with a felony." Not literally true, but I understood his meaning.

Since moving to Ankeny my name and my face have appeared in the paper many times. Most of the time, I am associated with writing this column, or my work with the Ankeny Chamber of Commerce. To this day, I am moved to see that something I have done has again made it to print. Which leads me to a question for those who are small business owners or managers; what have you done lately to make your employees feel special?

I am not necessarily suggesting that you take out a full page ad in this paper and list each employee's name, their accomplishments and what they mean to the company, although that might be nice. What I am suggesting is figuring out a way to say thank you to those who make an accomplishment. Writing about them in a company newsletter, or posting something on the company bulletin board would be appropriate. People like to be noticed for the good they are doing. Publicly acknowledging them not only makes them feel good, it will inspire them to continue to do more.

Publicly acknowledging them helps the people that work for us feel like they are making a difference and that ultimately means more profits to the bottom line.

As I played baseball through high school and some in college, I still had trouble hitting a curve ball. But I also looked at the box score for my name, just like I look every other Tuesday for this column. Seeing it in print still gives me a good feeling.

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