

When my wife called about 4:00 in the afternoon to see if I wanted to play softball with the Mercy North co-ed softball team, I thought she was pulling some kind of joke on me. She went on to explain how they needed men because several of the doctors were working and other regular players were simply not available. In my younger days I was more of a baseball player and never really got the hang of slow pitch softball. I played just enough to know I wasn't strong enough to hit a lot of home runs and not fast enough to hit a lot of singles.

She reminded me that they really didn't care how good I was, they were looking for guys to play. It has been more than 20 years since I played co-ed softball and 15 years for any softball at all. With much trepidation, I agreed. Luckily for me they didn't put me in the outfield and needed someone to play first base, the position I played in high school and was comfortable with. Playing defense was a strong suit for me and my old instincts came back pretty easily.

Batting was another story. At the bank Micah gave me a few tips on how to successfully get on base. All those left my head as soon as I stepped up to the plate. My first of 3 swings was a screaming line drive right down the third base line. The third baseman had great reactions and caught the ball before I took 2 steps. My new teammates were disappointed but encouraging. My next trip to the plate I was told to hit the ball just like the previous time. So I did.

For the second time in a row, I hit a solid line drive right at the third baseman, who caught it before I was out of the batters box. Two times up, two swings, two line drives toward third base, two outs before I could take two steps. The reasons I didn't really play softball before started coming back to my head. In the final inning, my last time at bat, I was told that if I could hit the ball on the ground, our runner on third should be able to score. No pressure there!

The pitch came in a little high, but I thought I could contribute offensively for the team. I again hit the ball very hard and this time it didn't go to the third baseman. Instead the pitcher caught my third line drive of the night right before it hit his shoelaces. My teammates were stunned into quiet amazement.

As small business owners and managers we often have that entrepreneurial spirit. That means we take on challenges and new ideas and give them a try, even if they are slightly outside of our comfort zone. Like me playing slow pitch softball. Often these new ideas have mixed results and make the decision to move forward very difficult. With my softball career last week I did pretty well defensively and I hit the ball hard, but in the end produced no results.

Now my decision to play softball again, assuming the "Have Mercy" team is again desperate for guys, will be difficult. Yes I had fun, but did I contribute enough to warrant playing again? In short, did the results produced give enough reason to try again, or should we quit before anyone gets hurt? Those are the questions business owners have to ask every time we launch one of those new ideas. More often than

not there is no clear cut answer. Set a goal and a timetable, and then your decision is easier.

The "Have Mercy" team invited me to join them again next week, and I don't think it was a joke. They don't care about results on the scoreboard, their goal is fun.

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