

To begin with, I need to disclose that I only played organized basketball in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and I was on the "B" team. Yes, I was taller than average and I really enjoyed the game, but I wasn't very good. When I was a freshman, there were 100 boys trying out for 40 spots on 2 teams. I got cut in the second round. Later in life I got a little taller and put on a few pounds (please don't snicker) and actually wasn't that bad. I am proud to say I was a pretty good intramural basketball player.

One of the things that keeps me busy now is coaching my son's basketball team. For several years I was an assistant coach for my oldest son Ted. Now that he is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and playing in the Ankeny school system and playing AAU for others, I have turned my attention to coaching my 5<sup>th</sup> grade son Ben.

As I became involved with watching my sons, I realized that I had a natural ability to explain basketball concepts to the boys. Once I understood the logic of why they were practicing a certain way, I could explain it and help with practice. That evolved into becoming an assistant coach when one of Ted's coaches moved away and then into a head coach for Ben when nobody else would do it. Suddenly I was forced to become a better student of the game.

As I became more aware of how basketball should be played, I noticed that the very best players did the little things with their eyes away from the skill they were performing. The best example of this is dribbling the basketball. It is a lot easier to dribble the basketball with your head straight down watching the ball hit the floor and back into your hand. But while you are watching the basketball, you miss everything else going on in the game. Many times you miss seeing the defender as he is ready to steal the ball from you. Other times you miss seeing your wide open teammate waving their hands wildly begging for the ball and to make that easy shot.

Now when I am running practice for those 5<sup>th</sup> graders I am constantly talking about playing and practicing the game with their heads up. If you run into one of the eight boys on the Ankeny Destroyers, they will probably tell you they are sick and tired of hearing me preach about playing the game with their heads looking up.

It takes a lot of practice to get good at playing with your head up. As small business owners and managers that is exactly how we need to run our businesses. If we keep our heads buried in the books, R&D, sales or any one aspect of our company we will miss out on a lot of opportunity to improve the other areas. This is something that is especially important in a retail environment.

I have had the great opportunity to help furnish three different banks. Each time, I tried to take off my banker hat and imagine myself doing business from the other side of the desk. That is why all my computer monitors are supported with stands or arms have been raised and come from the side of the desk. Everyone with customer responsibility should be looking out for the customer even while they are working on their computer. Some didn't like it very much in the beginning but after they practiced with it and understood the logic behind it, they actually felt like they gave better service to each customer.

As far as basketball coaching goes, I still struggle with understanding a lot of the finer aspects of the game and will probably never be remembered for winning lots of championships. But I do think in the end the boys will be better basketball players than I ever was. Simply because if they don't remember anything else about the game, they will remember that win or lose, I taught them to keep their heads up.

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