

For some reason unknown to me, my oldest daughter Emily decided that she wanted to run a marathon. 26.2 miles. Months and months of training. And not just any marathon, Emily decided that she wanted to run a marathon in Washington D.C. sponsored by the United States Marine Corps and as a fund raiser for the St. Jude's Children's Hospital. 26.2 miles, that's farther than I drive most days! Apparently working and getting married wasn't enough for this girl.

So Emily bought a book written for people who wanted to train for marathons. What to eat, when to run, how far to run and when to take a nice, refreshing soak in a tub full of ice. She followed that book religiously and not too much to my surprise, was running 20 miles at a decent pace. She did fund raisers to help the cause and offset her travel expenses. When October 25th came along, she was ready. Mostly ready. In her hotel the night before, actually the morning of her marathon, there were problems.

According to the multi-page letter she recently wrote to hotel management, the problem started out as a party in a neighboring room. Emily called the front desk and explained her situation of needing sleep because she was running a marathon the next day and requested hotel security curb the noise. After a reasonable wait, security did speak to the offenders but a short while later the noise was as loud as ever. Again Emily called the front desk and again asked for security to break up the party. Security again came to the party and for a short time the party quieted down. But like all good parties, started getting loud again, making sleep next to impossible.

This time she sent help to the front desk to personally shut down the party. Shortly thereafter the party morphed into a fight. She heard through the door that someone was bleeding and an ambulance was needed. She called the front desk a third time and unfortunately outside help was not called until a witness arrived at the front desk stating that someone was stabbed and "leaking all over". Apparently the party had gotten out of control.

It was several hours later that the police crime scene yellow tape was removed from outside of this budding marathoner's room and sleep could once again be attempted. To say the least, Emily was not a happy camper. Returning from the marathon course, she contacted hotel management to tell them her story and hopefully get a little sympathy.

Apparently sympathy is not a common attribute among hotel managers in our nation's capital. After a while, Emily successfully negotiated a free night in compensation for the previous night's issues. Management was not easily going to give up revenue for something they obviously thought was beyond their control. In Emily's opinion there was no apology, no attempt at making the hotel guest feel like, well a guest.

In our businesses we often have to deal with customers that have issues where problems beyond our control happen to them. Dropping a carton of eggs in the grocery store is not the store's problem, but most of the time they gladly replace the carton, the goodwill they get from that action is worth far more than the broken eggs. Give a little goodwill, get a lot in return. People will talk well of your business and more people will want to do business with you.

Emily did finish the marathon in 4 hours and 14 minutes. Slower than she wanted to run, but she was satisfied with herself and made her family very proud. The experience at the hotel was less than

desirable, and more importantly to her, management's response to her plight. Maybe her next marathon should be closer to home where she can stay with us!

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, president of First National Bank, Ankeny. You can view past columns at www.fnbames.com, under the "small business today" button on the right side of the screen.