

It all started with a phone call from my wife. Katie (our 24 year old daughter who lives in West Des Moines) wanted us to meet her new boyfriend. Unfortunately the day she decided to bring him home, I was coming home late after a long day at the bank. Katie's boyfriend seems nice enough and I tried not to ask too many "dad like" questions. When my wife later asked Katie what her boyfriend thought of her parents, the only thing that stuck in her mind was that I looked really, really tired.

Not long after that meeting, we were notified by Emily (our 25 year old daughter who lives in Kansas) that she was going to bring her new boyfriend home for us to meet. He also lives in Kansas but is originally from the Minneapolis area. Stopping by Ankeny on his way home for Thanksgiving would be easy and a nice way for him to meet the whole Friedman gang. All five kids would be home at the same time, and he could meet them all. A brave, brave act.

Over the years my three daughters have had various friends that were boys and boyfriends. Originally I thought I would try and be the hard core dad that boyfriends feared. The kind of dad who sits there cleaning his shotgun on the front porch when the boyfriend comes to pick up his daughter for a date. But I don't own a shotgun and although my stature is fairly tall, my personality is not to intimidate. Then I thought I would be the cool dad, the kind of dad who jokes around and is just as much a friend as he is a dad. But most of my jokes are pretty bad and would likely have the opposite effect.

Eventually I have decided that if I wanted to get to know who my daughters were spending time with, I would just have to be myself. I think the standards I had for my daughters has changed over the years as well. There was the discussion (actually several discussions) about boys who had one or both of their ears pierced. I saw it as a sign of rebellion, immaturity, or just simply just a waste of time and money. Then several nephews (on my wife's side of course) got their ears pierced and I eventually got past the stereotypes. And as my wife pointed out to me, piercings can be very temporary.

The subject then moved on to tattoos, something not very temporary. While I personally don't really understand the whole "body art" phenomenon, I have learned that some really nice people have tattoos.

As owners and managers of small businesses our businesses depend on having the right mix of people. If everyone in my bank were just like me we would be one sorry excuse for a bank.

I deliberately look for people to work with me that have talents, skills and personality traits that I do not possess. Sometimes it means we see different ways to get the job done, and we may disagree on the final decision. But in the

end I am comfortable that all quality alternatives have been thought through and the right decision has been made. This week I challenge you to look at things from an alternative point of view as well.

Overall I think that both Emily's and Katie's current boyfriends are nice guys, and they both seem to treat my daughters very well. No obvious piercings or tattoos. So at least for now I won't be asking for a new shotgun and cleaning materials for Christmas.

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