

November brings another basketball season. Another basketball season reminds me of an incident that happened this summer. "That kid is the worst...liar I have ever seen." That is what my assistant basketball coach told me during our final Ankeny Basketball Association summer league game. That kid he was talking about was my 11 year old son Ben. The situation: Ben had just committed a foul and was trying to keep a straight face, but couldn't help but smile because he knew he actually committed the foul.

Ever since Ben was a baby he always seemed to have a smile on his face. It is a smile that comes from way deep inside, one of those smiles that you just can't fake. When he was a baby, sometimes I thought it might just be gas, but it was Ben being happy with life. As a matter of fact, I did some research and found out that I wrote a column about Ben's smiling personality just over 11 years ago when he was only 3 months old. It is comforting for me to see him keep that personality trait.

His smile is also contagious. Sometimes when people come into my office and they see a picture of Ben and ask if he is always as happy as he seems. My response is that he is a normal kid with ups and downs, but for the most part he is as happy as he appears in his pictures. Then much more often than not, a smile comes to their face too.

I would like to tell you that Ben got his natural smile from his father, but I think it is something that comes to him naturally. He is wired that way. Unfortunately not all of us are wired like Ben. We have to sometimes remember to smile, to keep a good attitude even when everything around us says we are perfectly justified not having a good attitude.

Have you ever encountered a clerk at a store who didn't really care if you were there or not? In reality they would probably prefer that you not bother them. Foul moods and attitudes can affect co-workers and customers in a very unproductive way. Unhappy employees are not as productive as those who are happy. Customers who are treated with a smile and helpful attitude are likely to buy more, come back more often and most importantly, tell their family and friends.

In today's economy we need all the happy and loyal customers we can get. So I challenge you to take inventory of your employee's attitude. Do you have someone not projecting that happy image? If so, I guaranty that your business is not doing as well as it could. Even if that person does not have direct customer contact, they are affecting their co-workers

18th century British essayist, poet and politician Joseph Addison may have said it best: "What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. These are but trifles, to be sure; but, scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable." I am actually proud to have a kid who has a contagious smile and is considered a bad liar.

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