

Stretch me, please

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I am not sure exactly when or where it started. But a couple of years ago my now 14 year old son Ted was playing in a basketball tournament and was complaining about being stiff. Trying to be a good father, I offered to help him stretch. My first observation was that he was NOT very flexible, just like his father.

We went through a series of stretches that I tried to remember from my days of playing high school baseball. We concentrated on his legs, primarily working on his hamstrings. Fortunately he played well in that game and others. After a while his teammates started to notice my stretching and gathered around to watch. One of his teammates was some back pain and asked me to stretch him as well. The stretching made him feel better too.

For about the next year or so, I went on stretching Ted before games when I was able to be there watching. Gradually, Ted started to get more flexible. When his friends saw Ted getting stretched, at least one would come over and ask "Mr. Friedman, when you are done stretching Ted, could you stretch me too?" Of course I was happy to stretch them.

Last summer I was talking to one of Ted's newer teammates and explaining to him the benefits of stretching. Including the fact that when I stretched them, they seemed to play better. When I finally got the chance to stretch the new player's hamstrings, the look on his face was one I could imagine people have when they are tortured. During the time it took to go through the various stretches, our discussion focused on how good this exercise really was for him, not how much pain he thought he was experiencing. Fortunately he played well in the game and asked me to stretch him again in the tournament.

A couple of weeks ago, Ted's team was playing in a championship game of a tournament in Iowa City. No less than 5 of the 10 players on the team asked me to stretch them prior to the game. By the time I was done, my knees were sore from kneeling and I wasn't sure I could get everyone stretched before game time. But I did get everyone stretched and the team won in double overtime.

For businesses large and small, the very best and most effective advertising is word of mouth, followed by testimonials. The only potential problem with word of mouth advertising is that it typically takes a long time for word to get around, and small businesses don't often have the luxury of waiting. That is where testimonials come in.

Having someone other than you tell your story is kind of like massive word of mouth advertising. The only caveat is that the words have to be genuine and not written by you or an advertising firm. Not every client is willing or able to help, but when they do it can be a wonderful thing for sales.

Now that more and more people are seeing the benefits of stretching before the game, my 5th grade son Ben has asked me to help stretch him before his basketball games. I guess it is just a matter of time before I start stretching more kids on his team. Could this be a chance to start a small business? Now that might be a stretch.

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