

I was standing there with soaking, cold, wet feet. One step and I knew I wore the wrong shoes. My fingers were turning white because they were cold. I knew I should have brought gloves. Fortunately the wind was at my back, but I was still chilled. After about 10 minutes I started wondering why I volunteered to hold the down marker at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade football game.

It was the last game of the year and I got randomly assigned to both the job and the game. The fact that it finally stopped raining just before game time was one of the good things that happened. The maroon team won, but the gold team got beat. Several Ankeny kids got hurt during the game. Even though I was cold and had to stand for quite a while, I had one of the best views of the games. Volunteering did have its perks, especially since I planned on being there watching anyway.

That is what I want to talk about today, giving back, helping those who are not as blessed as we are, even in these troubled economic times. Especially in these troubled economic times. One of the ways I have decided to do that is through United Way. This year I have the great honor of leading the Ankeny portion of the United Way of Central Iowa campaign. It does involve some work and early morning meetings, and the goal of raising \$435,000 just in Ankeny at times seems daunting. But I get to tell the story of United Way and talk to a lot of people around Ankeny and Des Moines.

United Way can be a bother to business owners and manager. When I asked one Ankeny businessman if I could come to his office he reluctantly agreed, saying something to the effect that one more unproductive, non-income producing meeting probably wouldn't kill him. Fortunately his employees are still good contributors to United Way. On the other hand, a lot of business owners and managers view United Way as an opportunity. An opportunity to give, advocate and volunteer.

That is part of the theme for United Way this year. United Way of Central Iowa focuses our dollars in three main areas; education, income and health. Education is a life long process, but especially important in the area of quality child care and early learning. Studies show that 90% of a child's brain growth occurs before the age of three. If a family is lower wage earning, children are not often successful in school. They move frequently. They are less likely to have health insurance coverage. They choose not to treat a minor illness or visit the emergency room. United Way helps address the underlying causes of poor health like prenatal care, dental care for children and ensuring the elderly have adequate care.

All this is done with 89% efficiency. Only 11¢ of every dollar we contribute goes to cover administrative costs, a remarkable number for any business. And as a true capitalist, I like to think that we can help more people live better lives without big government, and definitely do it more efficiently.

So I ask you today to give thoughtful consideration to supporting United Way, with your company dollars, your personal dollars and allowing your employees the opportunity to give, advocate and volunteer. Supporting the common good is always good business, because if more people are able to succeed, the economy will be positively impacted, and we all do better. Cold wet feet at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade football game are optional.

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