

On mother's day, a good husband and his children will want to make sure that the woman of their affections does not have to cook. That good intention did not hold true at the Friedman household this year. Mainly because our oldest daughter Emily was passing through, and my wife Joanne wanted to make a nice breakfast for her. 11 year old Ben and I did volunteer to go to Hy-Vee to buy donuts after church.

Knowing that we were going to have several people eating breakfast, Ben and I decided to buy a dozen donuts. That was the easy decision, the hard decision was picking out which 12 donuts were we going to take home. Since Ben was with me, and there was nobody else at the donut display, I let him do most of the deciding.

Since we know that Joanne likes maple donuts, that donut was an easy pick. Of course any donut with sprinkles is an automatic pick, so we took one of those too. After that the decisions got a little more difficult. Partly because the selection of donuts were not to Ben's immediate liking, and partly because there were people now waiting on us to finish selecting our dozen. They were very nice and very patient, but waiting none the less. One of the people waiting even suggested that picking out donuts might be a good idea for this column. I think he was right!

The more I pressed Ben to make a decision on picking out donuts, the less success he had in doing so. I would suggest a long john with chocolate icing and Ben would say, "I don't know". I would suggest a jelly filled donut and he would still be unsure about who would like to eat it. What I didn't have time to explain to Ben was my method of selecting donuts. Basically I pick out the donuts I like and if nobody else wants to eat them, it simply means more for me!

Every day in our business lives we have to make decisions. Some are easy, like what to have for breakfast (donuts anyone?). Others are more difficult like which person to hire or maybe let go. Indecision is something that can wear down and eventually kill a company. One of my favorite quotes is from humorist Will Rogers who said "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." That basically described Ben trying to pick out donuts on Mother's Day.

People hate to make bad decisions, so many times they don't make decisions at all, and let life happen to them. On the other hand, making decisions based on little or no information almost always leads to a bad decision. As owners and managers of small businesses we have an obligation to our employees, our owners and our customers to make the best, fastest decisions possible. That means doing our homework and having enough information so that a decision can be made.

Eventually Ben and I made our decisions on all 12 donuts, with the final donut being an apple fritter that everyone at home tried, but nobody really liked. Joanne got part of her maple donut, and eventually breakfast with Emily turned out to be a great decision.

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