

Today we just arrived back from a vacation at Lake Okoboji. The whole family was together and we enjoyed fun together at the clear, blue lake. Part of the fun is that some of my wife's brothers and sisters and their children join us. One of the activities we did as a large group was to rent a boat and go tubing on the lake.

Because I had the most riders on the tube, I had the honor of driving the boat quite a bit. My goal was to give the tube riders a fun, thrilling ride. Going straight was not going to be enough, I had to maneuver the boat so that the tube would move back and forth across the wake of the boat. At the same time I had to keep an eye out for other watercraft, quite a daunting task! Finally because we only had the boat rented for a two hour period, time management was essential. There was no time to worry about who might be getting too much sun.

There are some areas of my body that have never, and will never see the sun. Other parts rarely see the sun, one of those being my upper body. Being on a boat on a beautiful sunny Iowa day, I decided that was the ideal time for my chest and back to get some color. The two hour time frame we had rented the boat should have been enough time to get some sun without getting burned, especially using sunscreen. But I was wrong.

If you would look at my back today, you would laugh. I cannot see the exact color of pink, because I can only see the edges of the sunburn in the mirror. When I first asked my family to apply sunburn cream to my back, they couldn't do it because they were laughing so hard. I was then asked to keep my shirt off (a first in my lifetime) and parade my upper torso in front of the group (another first). Apparently the way I applied sunscreen did not cover my entire back.

To get a feel for my sunburn imagine drawing a line across my back, just above the shoulder blades, make a 90 degree turn down once you reached the edges and again across my lower back, you can envision exactly where no sunscreen was applied. Upon closer examination, you can see exactly where I could and could not reach with the inside of my hand.

As small business owners and managers we are limited to what we can physically do for ourselves. We can only physically reach just so far, do just so much ourselves. Others have to watch our backs so that we do not get burned. In my experience, there are very few people who are willing to take on that task and responsibility without being asked to do so.

Our responsibility is to create a company culture that encourages teamwork. Helping other employees when they need it and most importantly avoiding the dreaded "it's not my job" syndrome, which is the ultimate teamwork killer. The way we start to build this environment is by example, helping, not bossing people do their jobs better. Helping people is contagious and works wonders for morale.

I think it is important that everyone take a vacation to relax and get refreshed. It makes them better at their job when they return. If you can bring a little vacation memory home with you, it is probably even better. Most people just bring pictures, I brought home a sunburn that I hope will be gone soon.

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