

To shave, or not to shave: that was the question: Whether 'tis easier on the face and ego to suffer the cuts and burns of outrageous shavers, or to battle the questions of continued hairiness. With that last sentence, I offer my sincerest apologies to all fans of William Shakespeare. What I am trying to tell you is that after 32 years of growing hair on my upper lip, I decided to shave my moustache.

My wife has only seen me without it for a week many, many years ago. She said I looked like a dork and I started growing it back the next day. My children have never seen their father without a moustache. My mother has hated it since the day I was talked into growing it by a former girlfriend. Frankly nobody in Ankeny has seen me with a clean shaven upper lip, before last Saturday.

The thought originally started during a family summer vacation 2008. My daughters noticed that my moustache was starting to look more gray than black. Rather than encourage me to use artificial means to change it back to historic colors, they thought shaving it completely would be better. Since then they would periodically remind me of the gray continuing to edge out the black but stopped short of encouraging me to shave it off completely.

About 2 months ago I sent an e-mail to those same daughters asking their opinion of me "coming clean". For the most part they encouraged me to shave, saying if it wasn't the right thing for me that I could again grow it back. Every morning since then I have been thinking about shaving it off, but I left the final decision up to my wife. She would have to look at it more often than I would. She couldn't make up her mind either. Sometimes it would be good to shave it, others she wanted to make sure it stayed. On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, I took a poll of the ladies at the bank. The vote was to shave.

Thanksgiving day when I was in the process of shaving, I asked my wife if I should shave or keep. We decided to keep it for another day and decide on Friday. On Friday we went through the same routine again. Saturday morning I finally got the nerve and shaved my moustache of 32 years. I was amazed when noticed how I now felt the cold air on my upper lip.

As small business owners and managers we often do things the same way because that is the way we have always done them. Which of course, is not always the best reason to keep doing something. Periodically we need to examine why we count the inventory one way and not another. Or why we take our deposits to the bank at a certain time or why we keep using the same supplier year after year.

We might find that there are valid reasons why we do what we do. We might find that a little change makes a big difference and a different set of eyes looking at the situation might see something we overlook everyday. So I encourage you to get all your employees involved.

I found it interesting the varying reactions to people noticing my lack of facial hair. Some had an immediate and surprised reaction. Others didn't seem to notice at all. For the most part I think that people have accepted the fact that I no longer have a moustache. All the worrying and Shakespearean quoting was apparently in vain. To shave or not to shave really wasn't the question, it was to change or not to change.

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