

The last time we were together I was talking about my enjoyment in coaching my sons' basketball teams. One of the things I try to teach my players is that they need to respect the game, respect their opponents and respect the officials. When a whistle blows and they do not agree with the call, I have always told them not to argue. Their job was to play the game, my job was to coach and part of coaching is "working" the officials.

In a recent game, my "working" the officials cost me a technical foul, only the 3rd of my coaching career. Those that were watching those games will tell you that I did deserve my other technical fouls. And while I am not proud that I got the technicals, I will tell you that as a coach they had the desired effect in changing momentum and in my opinion, the way the officials were calling the game. This is one technical foul I did not deserve.

One of my favorite things to do early in a game to help break the ice with officials is to say something like "Don't worry, I am here to help on any calls you are not sure about!" Up until that game, every official I have said that to has smiled, understood my sarcasm and what I was trying to say. On that Saturday morning, the official said "We are not going to start that way coach", and with just a minute into the game, I got hit with a technical.

I was in shock. The kids were in shock and the parents watching from the sidelines were in shock. Not only did it give the other team a couple of free throws and the ball again, it had everyone in the gym walking on eggshells. So I did what any youth would do in that situation, I pressed the issue. Using one of my precious time-outs, I asked the official if I could talk to him. My assistant coach Jeff took the team into the huddle while I met calmly with the official at center court.

It is always clear in these kind of discussions who is in charge, and it is NOT the coach. I was able to explain my position that I was trying to establish rapport with him by using a little humor and not trying to question his judgment. Truth be told, I was trying to manipulate him into making more favorable calls for our team or at a minimum establish a forum to potentially plead my case later in the game.

First impressions can come in many forms including verbal or written communication. My first attempt at verbal communication with the basketball official that Saturday proved to be disastrous. What I should have done is what has proved successful in business. Start slow and find common ground. When trying to get my point across, I didn't even think about trying to see it from his point of view. My attempt to find common ground was not met very well.

My business suggestion to you this week is that when you are communicating with clients or employees; first think about who you are trying to communicate to

and think from their perspective. Second, try and find common ground. It will be difficult at first because we are so used to thinking about how things only affect us. When you turn it around, you will be much a more effective communicator.

A failure to communicate to players or officials during a basketball game can cost you a game. Failure to communicate with your clients or employees can cost you a lot more.

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