

What is in a name?

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The follow-up e-mails started coming just moments after the first e-mail came out. For its annual dinner, The Des Moines Partnership is having Thomas Friedman as the keynote speaker. Now before you think that I have gone all “big time” on my faithful local Ankeny readers, I must tell you that there is more than one Thomas Friedman.

Overall the gist of the e-mails had one of two themes; either they jokingly were congratulating me for getting a speaking engagement that is normally reserved for nationally known business leaders, or they were kidding me about not being very smart in choosing my pen name.

So I decided to see how different we really were. He is a regular (twice weekly) columnist for a well read national newspaper. I am a regular (bi-weekly) columnist for a well read local paper. He was born in the Midwest in the 1950's; I was born in Midwest in the 1950's. He has a moustache, I have a moustache. He is graying and parts his hair on the side; I am graying and part my hair on the side. My wife's name is Joanne; his wife's name is Ann. Kind of spooky, huh? His net worth is estimated at \$25 million, OK that is probably where the similarities end.

The Tom Friedman who is the keynote speaker for the Partnership is actually a Pulitzer Prize winning author who has written four best selling books and is a columnist for the *New York Times*. He is an expert on the Middle East and has just written a book about global warming, population growth and the increasing competition for new and existing energy resources. He has appeared on the David Letterman show and is a regular expert on the Today Show.

So why am I talking today about two people named Tom Friedman? Because he represents for me the most important asset I have, or any of us have, our names. When people think about your name, they automatically are making judgments about you and your reputation. In the banking business I have learned through others never to name a child after myself because I have seen credit reports where either the father or son have created problems for the other by not paying their bills in a timely manner.

The same theory holds true for our businesses. Our reputation for what we do best and worst always precede us. Our employees need to have the same pride in our company name that we do as owners and managers. When they talk to their friends and families, they need to be proud of what they do and where they work. That helps spread our good reputation. Every sale we make and every interaction with every customer helps spread our reputation, good or bad. We need to do everything in our power to make our names synonymous with something people want to be associated with, and something that makes our competitors cringe when they hear it.

Someday I hope to be able to write a best selling book or two, write Pulitzer Prize winning articles and be invited to speak at big time events like The Des Moines Partnership's annual meeting. It would be really cool when people talk about Tom Friedman, someone would have to ask "which one"? For now I will be happy writing a bi-weekly column for the Ankeny Press Citizen and receiving funny e-mails from friends.

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