

If you have a paper shredder at home or at the office, please read on. If your employer uses a shredding service, read on and be thankful. At our bank in Ankeny we do not use a shredding service. Being open for business less than a year, we do not yet generate the volume of shred-able material to justify a service, so we have an on-site shredder that works just great for us.

Last week one of our bankers, Micah, was attempting to show another employee how easy it was to empty the bin of shredded paper. Apparently it wasn't as easy as he thought. When I saw him coming across the lobby, he had a certain awkward and slightly embarrassed look on his face. My keen powers of observation were heightened. I noticed that his tie was around his neck, but the part that normally came down his chest was not the same.

Instead of coming to the usual point at the bottom, the tie had some funky fringe. It was also quite a bit shorter than he usually wore it. When I asked him what had happened, he explained how the normally quite tame shredder ate the bottom of his tie. Pressing for more specifics, he explained the whole story.

It seems that one of our employees asked Micah to show her how to empty the shredder bin, as it was quite full. Micah eagerly agreed and walked with Diane to the shredder. He showed her that the shredder assembly easily came apart from the bin, leaned over and lifted the shredder, separating it from the bin. Only when he leaned over, his tie became entangled with the shredder, and began pulling his neck toward the sharp blades.

Micah had forgotten the first step in emptying the shredder; unplug the unit. Thinking quickly he set the whirling blades back on to the bin and shut off the power. Diane was apparently not sure if getting the tie caught in the shredder was part of the demonstration, and didn't know whether to act, laugh or shout for help. To his credit, Micah finished emptying the bin, and calmly finished the demonstration.

One of the reasons I like Micah is his sense of humor. The next day he sent the following e-mail to the staff, tongue firmly in cheek:

“For safety reasons, the following rules now apply when using the shredder:

1. Shredders must use the buddy system. Do not shred alone.
2. The "Buddy" must be ready with a scissors to cut away an employee if he/she gets caught in the shredder.
3. All employees must take BSA (Bank Shredder Awareness) training prior use of the shredder.
4. Do not consume alcoholic beverages or cold medicine when using the shredder.
5. Disconnect the power prior to emptying the shredder.”

As small business owners and managers we often take our machines for granted, sometimes not fully understanding the potential for danger that lurks with each one. When we work with an object on a daily basis, we have a tendency to slip into a false sense of security.

Safety of our employees and customers must come as a priority, regardless of where we work. Items as simple as a paper shredder could prove to be dangerous. Any machine with a moving part has potential to capture loose clothing or a wayward finger. Any accident is one too many, so everyone needs to make safety a priority.

As for Micah, his tie has now become part of our Christmas decorations. He was good enough to allow me to tell you about his unfortunate encounter with the bank shredder. Feel free to stop in the bank to see the tie under the Christmas tree. Or you can alter Micah's new shredder policy for use in your own business. In any case, please remember: safety 1st!

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, president of 1st National Bank, Ankeny.