

Late night with the garage door
3/26/08

Last night, right as I was just about to put this tired old body into bed after a long day of banking, chasing after kids and celebrating a birthday, my wife called to me from the kitchen. Our garage door wouldn't close. Even though I was tired and not really in the mood to attempt to fix a garage door, I put on some warmer clothes and went to investigate.

Before I continue with the story, there are a couple of things you should know about me. First of all I can be pretty crabby when I get tired. Secondly I am NOT very handy. Combine those two traits and the recipe for fixing a garage door at 11:00 at night does not look good. As I investigated the problem, the garage door itself did not need repair. The electric opener however was not functioning as intended. It turns out that the "Safe-T-Beam" was knocked loose by one of my children earlier in the evening. Their name shall be withheld to protect them from further yelling.

When I first realized that the beam was the problem, I was relieved because I knew that this could be a quick fix, even for me. But as would be par for the course, there is no such thing as a quick or easy fix. When I went to re-attach the "Safe-T-Beam" it would not slide onto the bracket easily. I worked and fidgeted with the beam and ended up breaking the wire from the terminal. A four letter, not-nice word may have slipped from my lips when that happened.

Now I needed to grab a screwdriver, a sharp knife and a flashlight. Fortunately my wife was able to secure all of these items for me in a very short time. Even though the flashlight batteries were low causing a less than desirable beam, and the knife was not as sharp as I would have liked, I was able to peel away the insulation from the wire. Unfortunately the other wire came loose from the terminal, making me reattach two wires instead of one.

As small business owners and managers we are sometimes called upon to perform tasks that neither fit into our schedules or our inventory of talents. Doing things and having a schedule outside what is considered normal is part of what owning and operating a small business is all about. While some who wish to start their own business dream about being the boss and setting their own hours, those who are actually living that lifestyle know that reality is often far from the dream.

Owning or managing a small business is indeed a lifestyle. Talk to a few business owners and often they will tell you that their business consumes the majority of their life. They will work 60-80 hours a week and not blink an eye, it is just what it takes to be successful. They get called at

11:00 at night to fix a broken machine or answer a security alarm. But that is just part of what it means to own or manage a small business.

Now don't get me wrong, today I am just pointing out the fact that owning a small business is a lifestyle choice, not just a job choice. Along with the potential headaches and long hours comes the satisfaction that you are doing something not very many people can do. You are the boss, you get to make the final decisions about just about everything. You get the satisfaction of seeing what you created bloom into something great.

Last night I was able to reattach the wires to the "Safe-T-Beam" and the beam to the bracket within about 15 minutes. The door closed as expected when I pushed the button on the wall, and I breathed a huge sigh of relief. Not bad for someone who was both mechanically and sleep challenged. By 11:30 I was in bed, asleep. The child responsible for my late night repairs was safe, at least until I have to postpone bed time to fix something else.

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