

Often people ask me where I get my ideas for these columns and if it takes me very long to write. Normally I just look around at what has happened in my life that might be interesting and the words usually come easily. This particular column was not easy for me to write, the words did not come easily.

Normally our friends John and Jo Kay do not call very late at night, so when the caller ID told me I was about to be connected with one of them, I was excited, because they are usually instigators of good things. Jo Kay was on the other end and said she was in the process of calling some of her friends to tell her the news. She wanted us to hear it personally and not through the grapevine. Her husband John had just been diagnosed with ALS – Lou Gehrig’s disease.

Our conversation was cut short by another call coming in on her side, so I didn’t get a lot of detail. We knew John was having trouble with his throat, with a nagging hoarse voice, but nobody suspected ALS. Since I didn’t know much about the disease, I did a little research on line. ALS is a degenerative nerve disease that causes the nerves controlling voluntary muscles to die. The average life span of someone diagnosed with ALS is 2-5 years. Not very long. There is no known cause or cure. I had trouble sleeping that night.

A week of rainy weather followed and my wife had a chance to connect with Jo Kay, to see what we could do to help and how everyone was doing. Jo Kay is a very bright, observant and optimistic person, which are some of the reasons I like being friends with her. She told Joanne that after one rain, she observed a lot of worms that had come out of the ground, and a lot of ducks in her neighborhood. Soon after, a heavier rainstorm followed. The ducks seemed to enjoy the rain while the worms were drowning.

Jo Kay told Joanne that earlier she had felt she was drowning in bad news. After watching the worms and the ducks, she decided that she had a choice; act like the worms and be overcome by the water, or act like the ducks and swim above it. John and Jo Kay decided they were not going to act like worms and let bad news sweep them away. They were going to act like the ducks, get on top of their problems and manage them the best way they could, with prayers, optimism and action.

Some time ago, I heard a quote from an actress/writer: “A strong positive mental attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug.” Those words were spoken by Patricia Neal, and seem very

appropriate for John and Jo Kay. They have decided to take a strong positive mental attitude.

Having a strong positive mental attitude does not mean that you simply gloss over problems. It means that instead of letting problems overwhelm, you take a strong positive mental attitude toward conquering the problem. The problem doesn't have to be life threatening like ALS. Small business owners and managers face smaller problems like a drop in sales, personnel issues and inventory delays. How we choose to handle the problems, regardless of size, often determines if our businesses are successful or not.

Everyday life presents us with problems and opportunities to act like ducks or worms. Act like my friends John and Jo Kay. Act like a duck.

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