

How tall will he be?

5/21/08

I knew it was going to happen someday, I just wasn't prepared for it to happen so soon. Part of the problem is that it is going to probably happen again. My oldest son Ted (age 13) seems to be very happy with the fact that it finally happened. Me? I am not quite so sure.

Before I get very deep into my problem, let me tell you a few facts I found on-line: The average adult male in the United States stands about 5' 10" tall. Approximately 4% of the male population in this country is over 6'2" tall. Less than 1% of the female population is over 5'10". I stand right at 6'4" tall and my wife stands just under 5'11".

I remember when I was growing up one of my personality quirks was that I wanted to be able to easily see the top of the refrigerator. Once I reached that milestone, I was happy. Don't ask me why. My brother (who is 6 years older than I am) is 6'7", but that never bothered me. Probably because he is an older brother and I felt that as an older brother, he should be taller.

Now this new development isn't making me unhappy, it just kind of bugs me. I have denied the fact for several months, but I can't run any more. Ted is now slightly taller than I am. I am no longer the tallest person in my house. Because I still outweigh him by more than 40 pounds, I am still bigger than he is, just not taller. It bugs me, and I don't know exactly why.

Sometimes in the business world we come across facts that are indisputable, but do not make us happy. In all likelihood they cause us heartburn and sleepless nights. The question is how do we react mentally to the facts and what action if any, do we take? For example, a competitor comes out with a great product at a great price before we do. We hate the fact that this happened but we cannot simply just sit there and cry. As small business owners and managers we have to take action.

What action we take says a lot about who we are and what kind of organization we have. Most likely we have to acknowledge the facts and work hard to either provide our customers a competitive product or find a different way to compete. Simply putting our head in the sand and hoping the problem will go away is simply not an option. If we have done a good job, most of our customers will be willing to wait a reasonable period of time for us.

People who see Ted and I standing together will often ask how tall we think he is going to get. Unfortunately we really don't know, Ted has never broken a bone or had a reason to x-ray his growth plates. Because he loves to play basketball, he would like to grow to be 6'10" or better. After trying to figure it out I have come to the conclusion that he will be as tall as he is supposed to be, regardless if it is 6'4" or something taller.

I am starting to accept the fact that Ted is taller than I am. When his younger brother Ben starts to be taller than me, and I end up as the shortest male in the house, I may have take

solace in the fact that he just might be older than 13 when it happens, and my dad went through the same thing.

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