

How far will you read?

5/07/08

Because my three older children are now away from Ankeny, they do not get the opportunity to read my columns. So when I e-mail the column to the paper every other week, I copy each of them so that they can keep up on what I write. Every now and then I will ask their opinion of what they read, just to get a point of view from a different generation. A couple of weeks ago I asked my 19 year old daughter Jenni if she read a column.

Jenni is a freshman at the University of Iowa and currently a double major in Spanish and Business. Knowing what her major is will be more important as you read further. Even though Jenni is in college, she has not quite learned yet how to be tactful with her father. If you are a regular reader of this column, you know that my style is to write about something in my life that I have observed, and then relate the story to business. Another fact that will be important as you read further.

Now I don't remember Jenni's exact quote, but it went something like this..."I really like what you wrote, but then again I only read it until I got to the part where you started to talk about business stuff. Frankly I almost always stop when I get to the part when you talk about business."

I wasn't exactly sure how to take what she said. At first I thought it was typical Jenni. Then I wondered how many other readers do what Jenni does. Then I wondered why someone who is majoring in business at the University of Iowa would not read a couple of paragraphs that might help her sometime in her academic or professional career. Then I wondered if that stuff about business was really that boring, why did Jenni want to major in business.

As a college student I sometimes took my teachers literally when they told me to put my nose in my textbooks. More than once I did fall asleep at my desk, only to have my roommate wake me up with his laughing. Was it possible that my business writing actually put my own daughter to sleep? Finally I forced myself to stop wondering about things out of my control!

Learning is a lifelong pursuit. The world is constantly changing and it is important that as much as we sometimes hate to read and understand what is going on in our businesses, we have to read to keep up with the times. We don't have to read the latest books written by business "experts", but we need to know what is going on in our industries and in the economy.

In the end I decided that I should keep writing the way I have been writing. People in Ankeny have been reading my columns since 1994, so maybe the business stuff isn't too bad. Unless you talk to my 13 year old son Ted who asked what I was writing about. When I told him, he said "that's all the further I read too!" My only explanation is that must be in the genetics.

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