

"I went driving for the first time today, but I was extremely disappointed when I realized Mario Kart with my siblings has done nothing to help prepare over the years. Screw it, I'm taking the bus when I grow up." That was the Facebook post from my 14 year old son Ben after his first driving lesson with his father last week. Personally, I thought the driving lesson was one of the best first lessons of any of my five children.

Like his siblings before him, Ben's first lesson was at the Catholic Church in Ankeny. Of course it was during an off-time, when the only thing that could really be damaged could be the car we were driving and an occasional light post. I know it will be at least two years before we send him out driving on his own, but the more experience he has in a controlled environment, the better driver he will be when I am not there to help guide him.

We always take it easy when it is the first time in the driver's seat. Not a lot of turning, just getting used to the feel of the steering wheel, the gas and the brake, especially the brake. Ben did very well, not a lot of whiplash moments. Then we started turning a little bit, learning how to not only turn the wheel, but how to control the car all the way through the turn and beyond. That was a little shaky, but again he did a nice job. After several minutes of practice, I added the important element of turn signals.

Twenty minutes later, I felt we have accomplished as much as we could in the parking lot. My confidence in Ben was high, so I asked him if he wanted to take his newly found talents to the streets and drive the short distance home. The look on his face was a combination of surprise, disbelief and excitement. Personally, I was going to be fine with either one of his choices, but Ben is a trooper and decided that he could handle driving home.

We waited for the traffic to clear on First Street before driving out of the church parking lot. The turn was a little off as the car's wheels on my side went up on to the curb until Ben was able to straighten it out. Ben was getting visibly nervous for the first time.

One of the facts of owning or managing a small business is coaching and mentoring new employees. My daughter Jenni started a new job with Principal Financial Group and had 8-10 weeks of training. It is measurably harder to do that in a smaller organization. Most of the time we need those people up and functioning in their new jobs much faster. The question is, are you taking enough time properly training your new employees?

Training is important in the culture of your organization, not just the technical aspects of the job. Helping the new and existing employees set priorities is just as important. Are you prepared for the occasional "driving on the curb?"

I decided to extend our driving lesson with Ben and change route home to drive on several of the low traffic residential streets in northeast Ankeny. By the time he pulled into the driveway, he was really tired. He told me that there were too many things to think about and keep track of at the same time. Apparently more things to think about than when playing Mario Kart.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny. You can view past columns at www.fnbames.com, under the "Business" button at the top of the screen then look under "FNB Extras".