

Beware Ankeny drivers and pedestrians, there is another Friedman child with his driver's permit. Ted turned 14 in July and passed his written test on the first try. Does that make him a great driver right out of the chute who knows the rules of the road? Not at all.

As is tradition when I first take my kids driving, we go to the Catholic Church when no one is around and there is very little chance of damaging our car. It is there we try for the very first time turning and parking, backing up and using the blinkers. We talk about the importance of checking the mirrors regularly and looking both ways at an intersection, multiple times. Although he probably already knew where the gas and brake pedals were located, we took time to review which is which and their sensitivity to pressure.

Ted's very first time behind the wheel went well. He was a little nervous, and there was a little bit of getting used to both the gas and brake pedals (yes, my neck has recovered nicely, thank you). The next time out offered a little wrinkle in tradition. My wife suggested practice driving around the Mercy North parking lot, after hours of course. Ted did very well and drove the 10 blocks home without incident.

Not long after our most recent driving lesson, we were in a hurry to get somewhere and I grabbed an apple to eat on the go. With barely one hand on the steering wheel and one hand firmly on the apple, we hit the road. A few minutes after leaving the driveway, Ted said something about driving with one hand, and it caught me off guard. I wasn't expecting him to be paying such close attention to what I was doing or even how I was driving.

Inside, my brain and stomach were in panic mode. Outside I was trying to show Ted that after driving for 33 years, you have learned to handle driving with a little less attention to detail. Definitely NOT the right thing to tell your 14 year old son, who is just learning to drive. So I continued driving holding tight on the steering wheel with one hand, holding the apple and trying to add stability with my other hand.

All the way to our destination, I was thinking about the fact that Ted was watching my driving habits without me even realizing it. How many mistakes did I make and did I acknowledge them? Was what I was telling him different than what I was actually doing? Was I making the classic parental mistake of "do as I say, not as I do"?

Little do we realize as owners and managers of small businesses that our employees watch what we do. They notice the little things we say and do, and think that is the way to be successful. It is amazing how much louder our actions speak than our words. Think about your day one day last week, and watch your actions through an employee's eyes. Are your actions consistent with the messages you are sending?

If you work in an environment where safety is important, are you strictly following the rules? Or because you are the boss you think you don't have to? How about your interaction with customers and other employees? People will follow your leadership through your actions much better than through your speeches.

Now when I am driving with Ted, or any of my children in the car, I will be very conscience of my driving habits. That way I do not look like a hypocrite trying to teach and give advice. And drivers and pedestrians of Ankeny can feel a little bit safer.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, president of First National Bank, Ankeny. *You can view past columns at [www.fnbames.com](http://www.fnbames.com), under the "small business today" button on the right side of the screen.*