

Becoming A Better Driver

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Driving...we all had to learn how to do it. Some people just have a little harder of a time learning than others. I was one of those unfortunate few who had to learn the hard way! At fifteen and a half I was on fire to learn how to drive. At the time you would have thought my only mission in life was to learn to drive. Until this time I had just assumed learning to drive would be a cinch, all of my friends were doing it...why couldn't I?

My father took me to get the Driving Manual used for the written part of the driving exam exactly on the fifteen and a half year mark and he drilled me up and down for days. Finally, when he was satisfied with my "knowledge" of driving, I was allowed to go to the license bureau and take the test. I passed with flying colors, which of course reconfirmed my belief that learning to drive was super easy.

Now on fire with my "permit to drive," I bugged my parents *constantly* to take me out to drive. Finally, mom relented and took me to the elementary school parking lot. It was a cold day in December, following a big snow, and there were huge walls of snow bulldozed all over the parking lot. Mom switched seats with me, giving me the driver's seat and said, "Alright, let's go!" Excitement overwhelmed me; I was finally going to learn to drive.

The First Lesson

What my mom didn't realize was that she had to teach me how to drive, that even though I was a passenger for fifteen and a half years that didn't make me a driver. All

those little things that as drivers we assume everybody knows and neglect to tell those learning to drive, she forgot about. For example, we came upon a curve in the road that had a speed limit of 25 miles per hour. Usually, unless you go too fast and experience it yourself, you never realize the importance of really slowing down to 25 miles per hour. Rounding the corner, I almost hit an on-coming car while mom screamed in my ear and grabbed the wheel.

Another example entails pulling up to my first intersection, in which I was instructed to turn right. Not realizing that that required me to pull into the turning lane designated for right turns only, I pulled into the straight lane of traffic. Again, mom had just “assumed” that I knew what I was doing. Needless to say, without the proper instruction, I scared my mother enough for her not to ride with me for quite a long time!

More Lessons and the Driving Test

My second lesson with my father proved to be more horrendous than the first. My father thought that it would be beneficial for me to learn to drive in the city before attempting the wide-open spaces of suburb driving. The first lesson with my dad was attempted along a congested, construction filled highway within the city limits. For the entirety of the drive I was feeling claustrophobic...when all of a sudden the car next to me decided that he needed to be where I was, swerving into my lane. My natural reaction was to swerve into the lane next to me. Bad idea! I almost caused a nice car pile up! After narrowly escaping death, dad was also inclined not to take me out driving again.

My confidence in myself as a driver became minimal, and my fire to learn to drive was definitely smoldered. As my 16th birthday approached, I was not prepared to take my

driving exam. It wasn't until six months later that I braved the exam, only passing by a few points. From then on out little "incidents" kept re-enforcing my belief that I was not a good driver. My friends, sensing my need for reassurance, volunteered me to drive one day to get me over my fear of driving. Their plan failed, and at one point I thought everyone was either going to die of heart attacks or lose their voices from yelling at me. During the course of the drive I had stopped and backed up on the highway and cut off no less than four people. Instead of helping to ease my fear of driving, the incident increased it. Through all of this, I somehow managed to successfully learn how to drive to my satisfaction. However, the event left such a scar that I decided to look back and examine what this experience revealed about process of how I learn.

My Needs

Before my bad experiences in driving, I had never thought that I would not be able to learn to be a good driver. Until this point, I had been very confident about learning new things...driving being no exception. Not accustomed to failure, my perceptions of being able to learn to drive were changing. I took the picture of driving as a need- satisfying activity out of my head (Glasser, 1986). Glasser explains that in our minds we collect pictures of positive memories and store them in our mental photo albums, which are used to motivate us (Glasser, 1986). As my driving experiences became more negative than positive, I removed the picture of driving from my photo album and often just avoided driving completely.

In addition to mental photos, Glasser describes five different basic needs that need to be fulfilled: 1. To survive and reproduce; 2. To belong and love; 3. To gain power; 4.

To be free; and 5. To have fun (Glasser, 1986). I began to give up on learning to drive because it did not fulfill many of my basic needs. Due to others ridiculing and yelling at me while driving, I did not feel belonging and love, which in turn resulted in my not having any fun. I also felt like I was losing power rather than gaining it while driving. I felt that way because when I improvised on what I was supposed to be doing while driving, I was scolded and told otherwise, therefore allowing me no freedom to explore.

Feelings Are A Factor

Other factors that go into my learning process can be taken from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The test is divided into four different categories including Extroverts/Introverts, Sensors/Intuitives, Thinkers/Feelers, and Judgers/Perceivers. Take for example Thinkers/Feelers: personally, I scored in the Feelers section. This means that my feelings and what other people think of me are very important to me. Therefore, when others became scared to be passengers in my car, I took that to be a truth that I really could not drive.

Roles

Roger von Oech's book, *A Kick In The Seat Of The Pants*, introduces the idea that the learning process can be divided into four parts: the Explorer, Artist, Judge, and Warrior (von Oech, 1986). The explorer is the role responsible for searching out new ideas and information. The artist's role is to convert and elaborate the new information into new ideas. The judge then evaluates the new ideas and decides which options would be best to take. Then the warrior puts those ideas into action. These four stages can be related to my process of learning to drive (von Oech, 1986). The problem that I encountered in my learning process was that my explorer was too inhibited by my negative

experiences to go out and search for new ideas. So instead, my explorer was in charge of finding new ways to overcome my fears and my misconceptions of being a bad driver. My judge tended to jump in too early and cut off my artist before it had time to create and discover new ideas. It did this because in my mind I had already decided that I was not a good driver and didn't see the use in exploring new ways to become a good driver.

The Power of Myth

The book, *Learning Conversations*, suggests that it is your own personal myths that disable your ability to learn (Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1985). People arrive at convictions about their own learning by how others influence them. It can also be attributed to failing in certain circumstances and generalizing to all areas (Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1985). These are beliefs that I see sometimes in myself; that at times prevents me from learning and accomplishing tasks. Driving is an excellent example of this. I believed that I could not drive. I had plenty of people tell me that I could not drive and enough bad driving experiences that re-confirmed the idea in my head. Through this class I have learned that this personal myth is not true at all. In fact, I am now under the assumption that anybody can learn anything. It was not that I was bad at driving, I just did not realize that practice makes perfect.

Another personal myth that I had included is the fact that I thought certain people were innately able to learn and perform tasks. I believed people were naturally inclined to excel at driving and that because I was not I would never learn to be a good driver. In reality though, that is not the case. With a little bit of practice, one can learn anything.

Reflection

Through the years, I guess I have always known that I could learn to drive with a little patience, time, and practice. Being forced to drive to college and home again really gave me good exposure to many different driving conditions and has allowed me to become a more confident driver. My freshman year I found a friend who believed in me, and what a difference that made in my driving. Through conversations with her I was able to re-evaluate my past driving failure and find a better approach. She helped me realize that everyone was not a born driver and mistakes would and do happen. Through our conversations, I learned that when I get lost, it's not the end of the world. Just turn around! When you make a mistake, it's okay. Use the mistakes as a guideline of "what not to do next time". Through her I learned to effectively drive and to be confident in my driving.

Teaching Others

By using my past as a resource, I would be able to help others learn to drive. Over time, I have learned how to overcome my fears of driving, and therefore I would be able to help alleviate a new driver's paranoias. When teaching, I would instill in the learner a sense of confidence that will in effect help them to think of themselves as being a competent driver. When I was learning to drive, my passengers and instructors focused on the negative aspects of my driving. It is imperative that the driver is confident in himself or herself before driving. While helping others learn to drive, I will remember how others reacted to my driving. I will try to be patient and definitely not yell and grab the steering wheel as my parents did. I have found that when the instructor stays calm and keeps the atmosphere at a level state, the experience is often more positive for both the

learner and the teacher. I have also learned not to “assume” that the new driver automatically knows how to drive. Rather, it can never hurt to review driving procedures before hitting the road, being clear in directions, and making sure that the driver is comfortable asking questions at any time.

All is well In the End

Overall, my opinion has changed about driving. In my learning conversation with my freshman year friend, I was able to change some of my personal myths (Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1991). I have restored driving as a need-fulfilling picture in my mental photo album (Glasser, 1996). Knock on wood, I have not had or caused any accidents in my five years of driving experiences! Though reflection, I have realized that if I can overcome a fear of driving, anything is possible. The learning process really relies on the right mind set and enough practice.

References

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