

The day I turned 15.9 years old, I immediately went to the DMV to get my learner's permit. That day was to be the first day of the rest of my life! Soon, I would be able to toss my bus pass and be wheeling my way through the streets of Springfield. The only thing standing between me and freedom were a few drivers' ed classes.

As was often the case in my teen years, my parent's had a different plan. My father, who thought he was smarter and more capable than any teacher I ever had, announced his plan to teach me to drive. I knew this was a recipe for disaster, but had no other option. I drove from home to school every morning with him sitting next to me in the passenger's seat. He sat sideways, facing me poised to grab the steering wheel from my hand or slam his foot on the brake at the first sight of danger. I often wished he would sit in the back seat so that I could relax and take full control of the car.

Our last training session ended when I took a wide turn onto a narrow street. A car was approaching so he leapt into action, yelling my name, grabbing the steering wheel and stamping his foot on the imaginary brake on his side of the car. I stepped on the gas instead of the brake and together we steered the car onto the curb, over a street sign and back onto the street. Without discussion, we switched seats and our morning driving lessons came to an end.

I eventually learned to drive and five years later, my parents gave me a car. I was beside myself until I discovered that standing between me and my freedom this time was a manual transmission! I dreaded the idea of having to learn to drive a stick shift. The memory of my original driving lessons with my father was still fresh in my mind. I would prefer to let my parents shuttle me around. But, this time things were different. We drove to an empty parking lot. He explained how to ease my foot off the clutch while giving the car gas. Then, he got out of the car and watched me drive. I was driving like a pro in no time.

I now have two children of my own and understand my father's initial desire to take control. I tell this story as a lesson to parents, who may be inclined to "grab the wheel" in your young adult child's job search. The lesson - give advice and counsel, and then step out of the car.

Forbes magazine recently published an article titled, "Are Parents Killing Their Kids' Careers?" In it, they told stories of parents who attend career fairs, schedule job interviews and even write thank you letters to recruiters on their children's behalf. The writer questions whether this level of involvement is overkill. My answer is YES! The closer it gets to summer vacation and graduation, the more calls and emails I receive from parents masquerading as their children - checking the status of an application or inquiring about the availability of jobs and internships. I always make a point to write the name of the "child" on a post it note so that I remember to put their resume in a special place - the garbage. That might sound harsh, but I don't want to hire a person who doesn't have the initiative schedule their own job interview or follow-up on their resume. Every step of the job search process provides a recruiter or hiring manager with proof of a candidate's abilities and motivation or lack thereof.

So parents, resist the temptation to take control. Instead, empower and encourage your children drive their own professional destiny. Be available for advice and an extra nudge where necessary, but by all means, let them drive!