



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Quit Taking a Ride and Take the Wheel

by Alex Flores, Past South Coast Regional President

This article was originally published in the Golden Slate in 2010 but still has relevance decades later.

I receive the Zig Ziglar newsletters on a weekly basis, and the ideas they share have become some of the most influential resources I use to improve my performance as an agriculture teacher. Zig focuses on leadership and spiritual guidance, which helps me find new ways to grow as an education professional and strengthen relationships with my students, parents, community, and school.

The newsletters also help me put my leadership role in CATA and agricultural education into perspective, from my section and region to the state. They encourage me to think about how I can continue to grow as a leader and better serve the students, teachers, and agricultural education programs I represent.

In one of his leadership reflections, Lee Cohan uses a simple analogy to describe the choices we make in our professional and personal lives: Are we the driver, or are we the passenger?

The passenger has the luxury of sitting back and letting someone else determine the destination, the pace, and the route. There is comfort in simply going along for the ride. But being the driver means accepting responsibility for where you are going and how you get there.

Cohan writes: "On any of life's journeys, we have to make a choice before we begin any of life's trips. Our options are these: we can be a passenger, or we can be the driver. It's our choice.

It's not what happens to us but how we choose to respond to what happens that determines our next move, next path, next relationship, and next risk. If you choose to be a driver, you accept responsibility for moving toward your goal. You pay attention and focus on getting to your destination. You make decisions on how quickly to move ahead. You avoid potholes and stray ice chests in the road. You decide when to stop and refuel. You may choose to take a detour.

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The physical distance between a passenger and a driver is less than three feet; the psychological distance is enormous. Which would you choose to be?"

The analogy is particularly relevant to agricultural education, where teachers make countless decisions about their classrooms, programs, students, FFA chapters, and involvement in the profession. We cannot control every circumstance or challenge that comes our way, but we can choose how we respond and whether we take responsibility for the direction we are heading.

So, as another school year gets underway, it is worth asking: Are we simply along for the ride, or are we willing to take the wheel?"

CATA and FFA: Helping Members Take the Wheel

We have all been both in the passenger seat and on the driver's side. Sometimes it is nice to be on the passenger side, but as agriculture teachers, I think we have a built-in autopilot that makes us want to be in the driver's seat for the most part. On the flip side, our students are learning to be drivers, regardless of whether they are officers or members. It takes time and patience to develop the necessary skills to take over when needed and to know when to step aside and be a follower or passenger.

When my term as CATA Regional President began, I was not sure how much of an impact I would have, being from a single-person department, a small school, and a small section. But then I realized how much others have influenced me to become a strong agriculture teacher and how I have been able to be effective in all areas of our agriculture program.

The same goes for our FFA members. We encourage them to take the lead so they can be successful in real-life situations and prepare for the rigors of their future. One of my personal joys is making an impact on students who might otherwise have coasted through high school. I believe we continue to make the necessary strides in making our students better by promoting leadership, projects, field trips, and, most importantly, recognizing their achievements.

Just this past week, one of my students who is attending the University of Dubuque in Iowa came to visit me. I could not believe the changes that had already occurred in his life. He is a completely different student from when he was in high school, and it was only several months ago. He is in the driver's seat and is ready to take the wheel for the journey of his life.

Whether you're in the driver's seat or the passenger seat, take turns controlling the wheel. A real driver has the remarkable ability to deal successfully with the unexpected, the unusual, and the extraordinary. We may not control the road ahead, but we can choose who is behind the wheel.

