



The skills we learn as drivers also apply to life.

# THE ART OF GETTING THERE

By Laurie A. Helgoe

**THIS SUMMER, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY** to accompany my 16-year-old son and his buddy on a “crash course”—or rather, a “crash prevention course”—in driving. This was not a typical driver’s education class taught as a sideline by the high school history teacher. This was a four-hour course with instruction from professional race car drivers!

The program is called “Driver’s Edge,” ([www.driversedge.org](http://www.driversedge.org)) and is a nonprofit established by pro driver Jeff Payne in response to the staggering statistics on car accidents among young drivers. We signed up for the closest training on their National Tour, and the boys were privy to \$400 worth of professional training each—at no charge. Though I was there as an observer, I learned more in those four hours than anyone had ever taught me about driving. But what struck me most was how much the driving instructors

taught me about successful living.

As managers of wealth, you serve as both driver and driving instructor, and the last thing you want is a crash. Let’s look at what the winners on the track have to say about steering toward success:

**“Always look where you want to go.”** This principle, underlined in the “Driver’s Edge” manual, was emphasized throughout the training. Seems simple, but looking ahead actually takes considerable discipline. People usually look right in front of them. They look at where they are. And they look at the obstacles they want to avoid. Professional drivers learn to set their gaze ahead as far as possible—to look around the curve, to focus on where they want to go, not just where they happen to be.

The instructors drilled into us that our eyes are the driver’s most important tools. Though we may associate racers with their quick reflexes and high-powered cars,

their real skill is visual. As one instructor put it, “Your hands will do whatever your eyes tell them to.” Just look there, and you will go there.

So, in order to get where we want to go, we need to look there. Yet, when it comes to financial matters, it’s easy to be short-sighted. Even when we think about long-range goals such as retirement or wealth-enhancing investments, we might ask, “Is this all there is?” It is not until we risk looking beyond our comfortable range that we can see possibilities that really excite and move us to meaningful new realities. Bill Gates didn’t stop at creating a multi-billion dollar corporation; he’s working to feed the world. Real wealth emerges from vision—not a one-time revelation, but the practice of seeing further and farther out, from “what is” to

“what could be.”

This principle is one of the hardest for people to grasp. As the instructors noted, we naturally want to focus on a target—looking to the great wide open makes us nervous. Yet, when we learn to look be-

car on course. He was exhilarated. And he was safe.

We tend to operate on the very dangerous assumption that what is close and known is safe. This is why abused children grow to find abusive lovers, why credit

out a care, a deal on high-maintenance property won't tempt you. A good driver is not just wishing for a better destination. She is on her way.

This attitude of working backwards from where we are going requires a new attitude toward reality. We usually refer to “reality” as what we come back to after vacation—the part of life we dislike, the slow cars and annoying people who get in our way. These things are no more “reality” than relaxing in the sun or hitting a financial jackpot. Reality is whatever you want it to be—if only you have the courage to look there.

Like good driving, looking to our personal destination takes practice. Here are some ways you can help you clients improve their skills:

1. When you ask a client about his goals, challenge him to look even further out. What excites him? If he had nine lives to spare, what scenarios would he want to play out?
2. Encourage your client to give regular time to daydreaming, to imagining in detail the possibilities for her life—and for her money.
3. Help your clients connect smaller decisions with the big picture. Ask: “Is this taking you toward your destination?”
4. Be open—and help your client be open—to changes in itinerary. As awareness grows, new possibilities emerge. Allow the best to get better.

Looking further out can feel uncomfortable at first. Remind your clients that discomfort is a good sign—evidence that they are trying something new, moving out of the circular skid, even entering new territory. And just on the other side of discomfort is excitement. Don't believe me? Check out the crowd at the next NASCAR race.

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yond the present, we are ultimately safer. We notice more; we avoid quick turns, jerky movements, skids and collisions. And we get there.

**“Don't target-fixate.”** The instructor who led the skid-training exercise talked about what happens when a car makes a direct hit into a telephone pole. He argued that the driver of the car is steering very well: “wide open spaces in every direction, and she manages to make a direct hit into a narrow pole.” Just as we avoid looking ahead, people tend to focus on obstacles—and then hit them. Worry about money is a great example of this fixation. Worry moves us closer to the obstacle. We worry about having to work harder to make more money, and we work harder—proving that we are slaves to work. We worry about theft, and our resources go toward protecting the fortune rather than expanding it.

Letting go of obstacles, looking back to the open road rather than the securely rooted pole, requires courage. And that's where the excitement begins. My son drove at full speed onto a wet course that had been topped off with liquid detergent. (Do not try this at home!). The instructor pulled on the emergency brake, forcing him into a skid, and told my son to ignore the cones and look ahead. He stayed between the cones and kept the

cards start to own their owners, and why scared drivers run into telephone poles. But what a happy realization to learn that what is safer is also more exciting and interesting!

**“It is better to anticipate than it is to react.”** Most drivers pay closest attention to what is right ahead of them. While this may sound like a good idea, it can be dangerous—especially when what is in front of you appears out of nowhere. Like target-fixation, restricting our view feels safe but puts us at risk.

But if we're looking way ahead, will we miss what's close by? Thankfully, our eyes can accommodate the whole scene. When we look far ahead, we still see what is close. And we see things before they get close. We anticipate rather than react.

For example, if you are not exiting for another 10 miles, there's no need for you to get stuck behind a slow-moving vehicle. If you're looking ahead, you'll anticipate the potential obstacle and easily work your way around it. If you're looking immediately in front of you, you'll come up on the slowpoke, perhaps muttering a few expletives, and will need to react—that is, if there's time.

When we look to where we want to go, the destination becomes the reality we adjust to. So if your destination is to be free of weighty possessions and to travel with-