

This week has brought back some powerful memories for me, ones that I would have rather forgotten. Back in 2001 right after I earned my doctorate and Abrielle was born, I was ready to try my hand at being a college administrator. I had my newest degree in college administration, and nine years as an instructor, but I just didn't have any experience being the boss. So when I sent out my many resumes to various colleges I only got one interview, in Michigan.

I was an Oklahoma boy, born and raised, and I married a Kansas girl, so Michigan was way outside our hoped-for distance from family. However, as there were no other options of colleges willing to take a chance on a guy with no experience, I took the job as Dean of Arts and Sciences.

The job was great. I learned so much so fast about administration and what it is like to be a successful supervisor. It was a struggle at first, as new jobs tend to be, but it was fun too. There were challenges too. While I missed seeing the extended family there was another issue to deal with than just separation. It was the weather.

Not only was this job in chilly Michigan, but the city was in the Snow Belt, dead center of Lake-Effect Snow. That's not some exaggerated term or hyperbole. If anything that term is a vast understatement on how much snow they got in that small town. Thanks to Lake Michigan an average winter saw 99 inches of accumulation, but sometimes it was much, much more. In Kansas, after a few days, or in the case of this event, a week, it warms back up to the 40s and 50s to melt off much of the snow. In Michigan however, it never really warms back up until spring. So snow that fell in December is still there in March. They just keep piling it up or hauling it away in dump trucks.

Of course they were ready for the snow, with many snowplows, sidewalk blowers, heated intersections, etc. I do not know what percentage of the city budget went for snow removal but it had to be considerable. I remember driving past the city complex and seeing the snow plows lined up like a soviet military parade. They would plow all day and night to keep everything open. While I was there we only closed the college once, and that was due to an ice storm, not snow. At the college we constructed canyons of snow along the sidewalks between the buildings as it piled up. The college and the town adapted to the environment in order to live there, and so did I. Begrudgingly.

Winter for me meant waking an hour earlier than normal to dig our cars out. Yes, the road was plowed but the plowing effectively put a wall of snow between our cars and the street. So I got my exercise every morning. At night we occasionally had to park in a nearby lot while I shoveled the wall of snow that was erected in front of my drive while I worked. It was a wonderful way to both begin and end the day. That's sarcasm if you were wondering.

The weather was also a little scary. It meant carrying water, blankets, candles, matches, and an emergency flag in the cars at all times. Getting stuck in the many snow storms could be very bad if you were not ready. We all had to adapt. I did NOT like waking up every morning for four months to shoveling snow and double digit negative wind chills, or the thrill of driving through the occasional whiteout, but I wanted to live there so the situation demanded it.

The same is true with adapting your life to a new work situation. It can be a lot of work and a little scary. The unemployment numbers for the college's service area, especially Neosho County, is very high, some of the highest in Kansas. There are many folks who are out of work and need to adapt to a

new work or career environment. And there are folks who are currently employed but maybe quite unhappy with their job or want better pay in an in-demand program. NCCC can help with that.

We have so many career choices that can help someone who is struggling to find and keep a job in order to make a new life for themselves. Besides our transfer education, we have career and technical education classes such as welding, construction, allied health, aerostructures, industrial maintenance technology, surgical technology, nursing, occupational therapy assistant, and my favorite this week, heating/air conditioning technology. The programs range from a single course to get certified, to one semester certificates, to a two-year degree program. Depending on the career choice the student could be out and working in a very short amount of time!

I know adaptation is hard. That's why we have some extra help for folks who qualify for our Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. ABE instructors attend career program classes with the student to help them transition to the learning environment and help them along the way. Students who are both ABE and career and tech education majors often go through at little charge thanks to grants and scholarships. So they can earn their high school equivalency, if they haven't already earned their diploma while getting certified in a technical career! In the last few years 50 students have gone through our ABE program while attending night welding classes and earning their certificates.

The ABE program provides mentoring, in-class tutoring, and basic skill remediation to aid in student success. This Adult Education co-instruction component includes math remediation and employability skills, such as cover letter and resume writing, and interviewing skills. It's a beginning to end program that helps someone get the skills they need and then helps them land that new job, a one-stop-shop for adaptation to a new career!

After one particularly brutal winter in Michigan my wife Jennifer drew a circle around southeast Kansas on a map and said, "Anywhere in here will be fine." Message received. And that lead me here to NCCC. I adapted again to a new role as Vice President for Student Learning and later as President. Adaptation is part of life, both exciting and terrifying at times, but it is so worth it. If you know of someone who is ready to adapt to their next phase in life, have them contact the college. We are ready to help them do it!

Now bring on spring!