

My mother-in-law, Judy, did something I never thought she would. She got a smartphone. She has been rocking the flip phone for years now and was quite happy with it. But her phone was so old that the phone company told her that they will no longer support that phone on their network.

This type of problem happened a few years ago when another phone company told her that they would no longer support party lines. For those millennials reading this article, a party line was a phone line you shared with your neighbors. Each house had its own ring pattern and, yes, you could listen in on your neighbor's conversation, but you really should not. Judy was told by the phone company that she had the last party line in the State of Kansas. She and Velma, who lived down the road, were on the same party line. It was time to change.

Now with her flip phone no longer supported, it was time to change again. This time she was going to jump big. She was getting a smartphone. When I heard the news I cringed. Judy and technology have never gotten along.

You may recall earlier when she got GPS for her car and thought I had programmed it with wacky animal sounds, only to find out that her friend's cat was stowing away in the back seat. Or the time the picture went out on her television every time you walked by, but she and Dad kept it so that they could listen to golf on TV. Or the time an error message popped up on the screen from her DVD player and she complained to Netflix that the movie was ruined because the box in the middle of the screen blocked the picture, but they continued to watch it for another hour without clearing the message.

Judy called me and asked what phone I have because if she got the same brand I could help her understand it. Oh boy! Tech services for Judy. That's not a great job. Just to give you an idea of what that's like, she often uses passwords like FRUSTRATED, ANGRY, or THIS_IS_STUPID for her services. But, she is my mother-in-law so I agreed to help her. Plus, she said she would pay me in pie, which sounded awesome!

I admire her for learning new things, for adapting to the changing world (although not always willingly) and for trying hard. Her lessons have gone pretty well. She still needs to learn not to hold down the camera button so that she doesn't take 200+photos of a tree – true story. "Touch the button like it's hot," seems to work to keep her finger off the button.

But constantly learning and adapting is a skill we all need to develop and enhance. It would be quite ironic if a college did not believe in constantly learning and adapting. At NCCC we believe very strongly in keeping on top of new ideas, techniques and technologies. Nearly all of our employees have access to professional development funds so that they can attend conferences, take classes, receive training, etc.. For many employees we tie higher education and degree attainment to raises.

Identifying a professional development plan or meeting expectations on staying current in their fields is part of the evaluation process for all fulltime employees. Even our Board

of Trustees set goals for themselves for professional development, attending a conference each year and receiving training and information from college employees on a variety of topics through retreats and monthly meetings.

Employees also attend a great number of “webinars” or internet-based trainings on a variety of topics right from their desks. From training on new software we are purchasing, to issues in a particular teaching discipline, to new government regulations, to maintaining and advancing our accreditation, webinars are a cost-effective way for employees to learn how to continually adapt to our changing world and bring the latest ideas to the classroom and the college as a whole.

The most worrisome thing I have heard a past employee say was, “I don’t need to attend any more conferences, I already know everything I need.” Yikes, when we stop learning we stop growing, we stop adapting to the ever-changing world. To quote Philip Wylie, “Ignorance is not bliss, it is oblivion.”

NCCC has many students who have come back to college later in life to pick up new skill, stay current in their field, or just keep their minds active. We have a robust lifetime learning program that offers a variety of classes such as senior fitness, computers for seniors, and screen scenes – a class on movies. We have had people in their 60s and beyond earning their associate degrees. It’s never too late to learn something new!

I have gained a few pounds thanks to the amount of pie “payment” my mother-in-law has provided in the last few months. When she calls for another lesson, I usually respond, looking at an empty pie plate, “I’m sorry, your account is empty. Would you care to make a deposit so the lesson can continue?” I’m proud of her learning new things. She just found out she can watch videos on her phone and she is thrilled! (She has a thing for those Mathew McConaughey Lincoln commercials – don’t ask.) It’s opened up a new world for her, which is great. She may have been forced to adapt by the phone company, but she is better for it because she made the commitment to learn and grow. And I got pie!

If you have any questions about this column or anything else, please contact me at binbody@neosho.edu