“I didn’t fail the test. I just found 100 ways to do it wrong.” - Benjamin Franklin

Surprise! The road to a robotics program can be filled with complaining coworkers who don’t see why you should get money to buy toys, robots that don’t do what they’re told, and more. Here’s how we’ve navigated that road.

“Nobody gets why I want to do a robotics program.”

Probably this means your staff, since kids and parents will be thrilled about your program. We had people say we were losing sight of “the simple joys of reading.” We pointed out that libraries have always been about more than just recreational reading, including helping people develop job skills, and there are no better 21st century job skills than STEM. You can hand naysayers the Institute of Library and Museum Services report “Museums, Libraries and 21st-Century Skills,” and underline the part that says “If 21st century skills are the new design specifications for national and individual success, our nation’s libraries and museums are well-positioned to respond to this need… [I]t is critical that we envision, define, and implement library and museum approaches that integrate 21st century skills in more tangible, visible ways.”

“Help! My kids won’t settle down and work.”

Be sure they all understand programming basics like how to go forward, turn, and stop. Kids may pick up how to use a given gadget faster than adults, but that doesn’t mean they’re born knowing how to program. When kids get bored, it’s usually because they don’t know what’s going on but don’t know how to ask for help. When they can actually make the robot do what they want, it’s extremely exciting!

“Our robot can do one mission... by knocking stuff down.”

It may be time to reexamine everybody’s view of the big F— failure. Unfortunately, schools don’t do a great job of teaching kids the process of trying something, figuring out what went wrong, making changes, and trying it again. Do your kids think that if they can’t do something on the first try, it means they’re not good at it? Do they think that they should never fail at anything? Do YOU think that too? Robotics is a great way to teach kids that in real life, success usually comes from trying something that mostly doesn’t work, and gradually fixing it so it does.