

# Driver's desiderata: grant me serenity to cope with other guy's driving

*Teaching the other guy a lesson usually doesn't - but it can up the chances that someone (maybe you) is going to get hurt*

This column was to be on seatbelt safety, but my ride home from work the other night demands a change of plans. I had the unfortunate luck to be driving behind two men in two separate vehicles who were bound and determined to take their hostilities out on the road.

I'm guessing that one probably cut the other off somewhere along the line, or did something else that threatened the other's manhood. The next thing you know, these two intellectual giants are accelerating down Bishop Grandin in an erratic, high-speed game of Russian Roulette.

Meanwhile, everyone else on the road was either staring nervously into the rear view mirror, trying to second guess which lane would be the safest to get into before the duelling idiots were upon them, or breathing sighs of relief as the two raced passed.

The sad fact is that this "isolated incident" isn't as isolated as you may



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think. In fact, the behaviour is common enough to have earned its own clinical term: aggressive driving. In its extreme form it's known as road rage. That's when the violent behaviour behind the wheel (and yes, this is violence) spills outside of the car, and someone gets hurt or worse.

Granted, these two took the "road warrior" theme further than most, but many people adopt some form of aggressive driving without even realizing it.

### **Not me!**

For instance, have you ever been cut off in traffic and felt the urge to "get

even?" Has the slow moving driver in front of you irritated you to the point where you drove more or less right on his bumper, just so he knew you were mad?

Ever honk your horn at the guy in front of you who delays a nanosecond before advancing at the green light?

Sure, these scenarios are not as graphic or blatant as the one I witnessed. Still, they represent aggressive driving in its mildest form.

Psychologists have determined there are four "triggers" that most commonly anger drivers; feeling endangered, such as being cut off; being detained by other drivers who are going slowly; watching other people breaking the rules of the road; and feeling the need to retaliate.

Well, I'm not sure about you, but I'd wager that I face at least half of these triggers just getting from my house to the corner store. And I'm the first to admit it's hard not to get angry.

### **Easing off the trigger**

So, how can you avoid being an aggressive driver when those emotions can be triggered so easily?

Firstly, acknowledge the fact that yes, by gosh, I'm feeling impatient, frustrated, and angry. Naming what you're feeling helps take you "out" of the equation so you can figure out how to diffuse your anger.

Secondly, get to know what makes you crazy and focus on ways of dealing with your "hair-triggers." Some try to imagine an acceptable rationale for the other driver's behaviour (maybe he just broke up with his girlfriend, or she lost her contact lens and can't see).

Try talking to yourself, or providing running monologues for your passenger (my personal favourite, much to the chagrin of my wife), or whatever else releases the tension peacefully. Remember too, if your kids are in the car, stats prove they're

predisposed to act like you do behind the wheel, right down to how you handle being cut off. What kind of driver are you raising?

Before reacting to another driver, remember (come on now, be honest) the last time that you made a mistake behind the wheel; how it wasn't personal, how you didn't do it on purpose, and how relieved you were that the other driver didn't jump on you for it. Give them the same break.

Lastly, it's most important to understand that you can't control the traffic but you can control your reaction to it.

That's it for this week. In the meantime, be **RoadWise**.

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