

Road Rage

Responding to Others and Your Own

By

Jay Uhler

A car cuts you off! You are furious! You give him the finger (which means, check your oil; it's running low). Not really. It means, "I want to hurt you!"

Let's look at this scene for insight. The immediate emotion we experience is rage. The emotion behind the rage is fear. "He could have damaged my new car. My children and I could have been hurt! I/we could have been killed."

In an instant intense fear grips us about terrible outcomes from the B..., of either gender, threatening our life and precious belongings. For me, my car is my residence on the road. I feel vulnerable when someone threatens to destroy it or harm me in it.

It may help to take a deep breath and to realize that the incident is now over. We were not hurt. We can take another deep breath, slow down and regain our composure. **We are safe, if we do not escalate the situation.**

However, we have the option to act out our impulsive rage/fear. We can go after the other car, threaten it with our car, which puts the other person in reaction mode. We certainly are not safe with two drivers acting out their rage/fear. We, they and any passengers could get hurt or killed as that scenario evolves.

Let us look at the incident from another angle. What if we give the other driver the benefit of the doubt? What if the other driver for some reason did not see our car? He was preoccupied with a difficult situation at work, or a family member is ill or has died, or on and on? Who has not had a life experience which interfered with full attention to their surroundings while driving?

Yes, but s/he shouldn't have been driving if s/he isn't paying attention, you say, your voice dripping with righteous indignation. You may be right, but righteous indignation does not lead to safety.

If a main priority is to have a healthy and happy life, righteous indignation or acting out rage or fear does not help anyone to achieve either. Taking a deep breath and taking control of our emotions does.

Let's look again at the motorist who cut you off. **Drivers often do unsafe maneuvers for a variety of reasons related to the feelings of helplessness, fear and pain.**

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If you are late for work and you fear that your boss will be angry for your tardiness, you can feel helpless that you can't go faster and can fear the pain of your boss's wrath, or of losing your job which would lead to suffering for you and those who are financially dependent on you. Isn't it amazing how we can escalate fear into panic and do stupid things, like take chances in traffic? You and your family will all be safer, if you take a deep breath, don't take a chance and do arrive at work safely.

Let's consider another image of the driver who cut you off. A child is expecting the motorist to be there when s/he gets an award or sings/plays an instrument at a recital or is playing in a sports event. There is more pressure if the driver is to transport the child to an event with other people depending on the child's arrival. When it come to the children you love, who does not feel pressure when you want to respond to their needs.

Another scenario to consider: Let's say that s/he is rushing to the hospital to be with someone undergoing surgery or dying. It could be any number of stressful situations which precipitate the other driver's lack of attention or stupidity, yet none worth creating a roadway tragedy. It is worth giving the other driver the benefit of your kindness, with the hope that you will receive the same when you need it.

Pressure to get somewhere and heavy, slow or stopped traffic is a frustrating combination. It is a great combination for generating feelings of helplessness. It is a perfect combination to create an accident.

One way to manage helplessness is to consider your options. The one I encourage is to take a deep breath and do what is best for everyone's safety.

A way to manage fear is to recognize that fear is only an emotion. It is not an accurate indication of reality. On highways and byways our fear often occurs when the danger is over and we are safe. To take a deep breath to relax and get perspective is the best option.

When the issue is fear of pain related to anticipated angry response on the part of our mate, children, boss or other significant persons in our life, we need to contrast how being late affects them compared to the more painful consequences of a highway confrontation or accident.

Let's also consider that the other driver is an inconsiderate, hostile bully. It is his/her road and no other cars should be on it. S/he doesn't care who is the brunt of their anger or who gets hurt.

Even more reason to take a deep breath and get out of their way. They have no respect for anyone—not even themselves. When drivers have no concern for the consequences of their actions, when they are driven by anger, drugs or alcohol, stay away. Avoid them at all cost. Any confrontation is disastrous. Swallow your emotions, your ego and whatever else would get you into combat and let them do their damage elsewhere. **Be Safe!**

To learn more about how to take control of your emotions, go to the book or CD, *How to Make Friends With Your Feelings*¹.

Another issue related to the roads is **bicycles**. The *Commonwealth of Massachusetts Driver's Manual*² states, "Except on limited-access or express state highways where prohibited by posted signs, bicyclists and moped riders have the same rights to use public roadways as any other drivers, and they must obey the same traffic control and right of way laws."

The driver's manual goes on to state:

"Be safe when passing a bicycle or moped:

- Reduce your speed, because the wind turbulence or air pressure change caused by your passing vehicle can throw a rider off balance.
- Leave plenty of room between your vehicle and riders.
- If you have too little room in your lane to pass safely, you must wait for oncoming traffic to pass or for the lane to widen.
- At night, you should dim your headlights if you meet an approaching bicyclist

Be aware that a bicyclist or moped rider might react to a road hazard and swerve suddenly, just like any other driver. Remember, you should respect the rights of a bicyclist to use the roadway, as you would respect the rights of another motorist."

Please, respect the rights of a cyclist more than you would another motorist. A cyclist is more vulnerable. If you are in a hurry and a bicycle is slowing you down, focus on gratitude that you are not riding the bike. Be thankful that your cheeks are comfortably on a car seat.

It might help to know that the person on the bicycle is helping to keep our air clean. Take a deep breath of clean air and relax the pace of your life. You will arrive at your destination in a better frame of mind to enjoy yourself, your family, your friends or your job.

Remember, **safety for all** is a wise mantra.

¹ Uhler, J. 1993. *How to Make Friends With Your Feelings*. Boston: Ambassador Press International.

² Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Drivers Manual*, 1999. Boston: Registry of Motor Vehicles, pg. 92.

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(This article was written as a summary for listeners to the Jordan Rich Show, WBZ, 1030AM, Boston, when we discussed road rage.)