

Road Rage

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: It makes my blood boil when I witness discourteous drivers on the road. They are either tailgating or cutting people off, jumping in at the head of a turning lane or giving that obnoxious hand gesture. Can you tell me how to remain calm in the middle of my rage?

A: I understand your struggle! Even under the best of conditions, driving can be stressful. Aside from the possibility of becoming involved in an accident, a driver is responsible for keeping passengers safe. When another driver is reckless, aggressive or disrespectful, it can stir up powerful emotions that can lead to the road rage which you described.

If anger and frustration tend to override good judgment and you become consumed with vengeance, here are some tips you can follow in an effort to remain calm:

- Don't take rude behavior personally. Keep in mind that you are an anonymous driver whose circumstances were beyond your control.
- If someone is tailgating, do not brake or accelerate to shake the car off. Try to keep a cool head while continuing to drive the speed limit. Use your turn signal to slowly move to the right lane if you are passing and be happy you are off the hook when the person overtakes you.
- Refrain from retaliating or laying on the horn when someone has cut you off. A horn is a tool to warn of danger and should not be used to express anger. Be thankful that the incident didn't result in an accident.
- Hand gestures can reflect another person's bad state of mind and you are not required to make their problem yours. Take a deep breath, accept that it happened, and don't stoop to their level.
- Considering that attitude accounts for 90% of how we deal with our circumstances, anticipating and visualizing a potentially rude driver can make you feel in control and prepare you to be your best when the real thing happens.
- Be proactive and courteous while driving defensively and do everything within your power to prevent or avoid a disaster. This is not the time to do unto others as they have just done to you!
- Condition yourself to deal with all circumstances in an intelligent manner. This is a matter of self-respect, respect for others, and safety.

Take some time to evaluate your own behavior and attitude toward the rules of the road and make necessary adjustments. Plan your travels ahead to make sure you allow yourself plenty of time to get to your destination and this will help cut down on stress.

When you take the initiative to develop good driving habits, you become a better citizen and a happier person despite the behavior of others. If you still have emotional bouts on the road, experts recommend that you pull over and take steps to cool down before resuming your trip.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708. Defining Manners: A School of Contemporary Protocol offers certified etiquette instruction for all ages. Private, group and school classes are available. For a schedule of classes or to organize a class in your area, visit: www.DefiningManners.com or call 570-696-3209 for more information.