

## Interact Courteously with Others

# 10

- Empower yourself and reduce stress by being courteous.
- Avoid competitive driving.
- Send and receive communications in a timely and positive manner.



### Are You A Psychological Time Bomb Behind the Wheel?

How easily do you become enraged by the actions other drivers take? How often do you get angry while driving? When you do get angry, do you take hostile, retaliatory actions? Do you engage in “road rage” behavior? We all have different levels of capacity before our emotional balloon explodes. Whether you have a large or small emotional balloon, you can eliminate it from becoming a psychological time bomb. Put yourself in control of your space requirements and eliminate stressful situations.

There is a lot of stress that creeps into our lives unnecessarily. One way to minimize stress is to eliminate some of the competitive situations that occur while driving. If you set your goal to strive for one or two times each day when you can be courteous to others, it can put you into a win-win situation. Helping someone gives you a good feeling, as compared to trying to compete with someone and losing. Spread some goodwill. Be courteous!

#### Be Effectively Courteous

To be courteous oftentimes means to merely maintain an attitude of consideration for the other driver. It may mean giving the other driver a break by applying your brake.

When a competitive driver cuts in front, the gap is small, and you may be forced to make a braking action, resulting in a lose-lose situation. A forced braking action is more stressful and more dangerous than willingly braking to help the driver out.

Applying your brake momentarily while approaching an intersection will give an oncoming vehicle a larger gap to make a left turn successfully across your path. By seeing a car that is attempting to make a left turn, and opening the gap with a slight braking action, you avoid the trap of thinking the car will not cut in front of you. When all ten of the good habits stated in this manual become *your* habits, you will be in control of traffic situations rather than victimized by them, thereby increasing the capacity of your emotional balloon.

**Does it feel better to willfully give, or to have others steal from you?**

#### Communication Options

**Surprises are great — or are they?** A surprise graduation party or a surprise birthday party is fun. A surprise visit by your best friend would be welcome and enjoyable. A surprise inheritance of a million dollars from an unknown rich uncle can be very rewarding. However, a surprise reaction as the car in front of you slams on the brakes is not fun, is not welcome, is not rewarding! Such a surprise reaction would be very stressful and take away the independence you have over your actions. The driver in front was in control. Positioning your car so that you can see and be seen by others gains you independence.

Communication skills can help you to effectively see and be seen. Therefore, others' actions will not result in unwanted, high-risk and stressful surprises.

### Sending and Receiving Messages

**Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages to and from other users of the roadway.**

Communication must take place early enough for others to receive and act upon the signals that you send. Similarly, you must read others' communications expeditiously to gain control of the situation and not be forced into making a high-risk, surprised response. Communication takes place through several methods.

#### Signal Lights

When should the signal light be activated? Signal lights should be used four to five seconds before making any change in speed or direction. Why? So that others have enough time to see it and interpret what it means. In addition to changing lanes, other situations that call for the use of the signal light are: pulling to and from a curb, entering and leaving limited access highways, and before making a turn.

#### Brake Lights

Tapping of the brake pedal flashes the brake lights to warn traffic to the rear of a slow-down or stop — it does not reduce speed of the vehicle. When you are stopped and see a car approaching from the rear at a fast rate of speed, tapping the brake pedal can be effective in alerting the driver. Tapping of brake lights is also a way to communicate “thank you” to a driver that allowed you to cut in front.

Some drivers will tap the brakes when there is a vehicle tailgating. That is an aggressive action and is not to be used.

#### Horn Usage

The purpose of the horn is to make others aware of your presence. Use the horn in a light tapping manner rather than a long sustained blast, which may be interpreted as an angry, aggressive, impatient action. Aggressive use of the horn tends to provoke other drivers, and in many instances causes a retaliatory action that can lead, and has led, to many serious and dangerous confrontations. To use the horn

effectively, you must see the situation early enough to get a positive response.

#### Position of Other Cars

You see a car change its position by moving from the right lane to the left lane, and the driver goes into lane position two of the left lane. What is that car's position communicating? You can expect that a left turn will eventually be made. It's easier to receive a message by seeing the vehicle's positioning than it is to see a signal light. Other situations when the vehicle's position communicates a message are: a truck positioned very close to parked cars tells you that the truck is double parked; a stopped car angled to the right at an intersection says a right turn will be made.



#### What Message Do You Receive?

The angle of this car, the right signal, the tires turned, and the back-up lights on say the driver is parallel parking.

#### Headlights

- Flashing headlights can warn oncoming vehicles they are driving into some danger.
- You should turn on your headlights when you use the windshield wipers.
- During daytime, it's a good practice to drive with your headlights on. With headlights on, other drivers can see your car.
- Before crossing yellow lane lines, such as while passing an obstacle or construction in your lane, put your headlights on to get oncoming traffic to see you.

### Speed of Other Cars

A driver's speed communicates what will be taking place. For example, if a car pulls out of a side road and doesn't accelerate in a normal brisk manner, you can expect that driver to make a turn. If a driver approaches fast to your rear, you can expect to be passed at the first opportunity. If a car that was traveling at the speed limit, in the left lane, moves into the right lane and slows down, you can expect that car to stop or make a right turn. When a car ahead of you is traveling at an inconsistent speed, and drifting into various side positions, most likely the driver is using a cell phone, or is drunk.

### Get a Commitment

Any time you are attempting to communicate with others you must not assume that your intentions are known until you get a commitment. To get a commitment is to receive a message from others that they acknowledge you. They may delay an action, or give you some type of positive indication that they understand what you want.



### Case Study

**At 3:30 in the afternoon a low-profile sports car went speeding over a**

**hillcrest.** Just over the hillcrest was a stopped school bus, with SOS lights flashing. The driver of the car barely had time to get his foot onto the brake before he smashed into the rear of the bus. The front of the car and the passenger compartment were totally embedded under the bus. The driver was killed instantly as he was decapitated. **Factors:** afternoon sluggishness, excessive speed, LOS blockage (hillcrest), not seeing a clear path of travel, not reacting to 4-second danger zone, stopped bus, didn't receive communication, vehicle mismatch (large bus and low car).

### Communication Cues

The responses drivers are likely to make are often based upon other events that compound the task they are performing. Searching the LOS-POT danger zone will provide you with cues to tell you what others may do.

A driver in front of you is making a right turn. He sees a pedestrian in the crosswalk and comes to a stop blocking your POT. If you saw the pedestrian, it would cue you to be prepared for the car ahead to stop. Eliminate surprises!

There is an oncoming car stopped, waiting to make a left turn; no cars in your rear zone. Most likely the driver will wait until you pass before making the turn. On the other hand, if there are a number of cars to your rear, and if you have 4 seconds of space, the driver's risk level increases; he may make the turn in front of you. To be courteous and to reduce your risk, you can reduce speed to open your gap to 5 or 6 seconds, which gets rid of the closed left-front LOS and it doesn't cost you anything.

### You Are In Control

With effective communication, you're in control, making you independent of others' actions.



The photo on page 2 is that of a cow looking at you. Notice how much easier it is to see the cow in this photo without the background clutter. The Zone Control System takes the clutter out of searching by defining what to look for, such as LOS-POT blockages!