



## *Work Smart Live Smart*

### **Avoiding Road Rage And Keeping Your Commuting Cool**

**By**  
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Have you ever had a bad day and then while driving home some "jerk" makes you even more angry? These are the conditions that are perfect for road rage. Almost everyone has experienced a similar situation and we can find hundreds of news articles on incidents of road rage. Even comedian, Robin Williams reports that he has suffered from intense road rage and once yelled so loudly that his embarrassed son begged him to put the window up. The only difference between you and a road 'rager' is how you deal with these feelings.

Commuting is the means by which many of us get to and from work and a study by Clark in 2000, reported that the average commute by Canadians was 62 minutes. Commuting can be a stressful activity, producing several signs of stress even when the person does not report feeling particularly stressed out. Stress can arise from traffic, weather, road conditions, navigating, noise, vibration, passengers and fatigue. This stress can lead to us being frustrated, angry and doing something that we may regret.

The phrase "road rage" entered the English language around 1994 in London and the Oxford English Dictionary first started listing "road rage" in 1997. It defined road rage as "a violent anger caused by the stress and frustration of driving in heavy traffic." Road rage frustration and aggression is not caused by traffic, no matter how heavy. Road rage is a learned cultural habit of retaliation.

Road rage can be a habit acquired in childhood. Children notice that it's okay to be mad, very upset, out of control and use bad language that's ordinarily not allowed. By the time they get their driver's license, adolescents have assimilated years of mild to severe road rage type behaviours.

To protect yourself and others, you have to get control of your emotions. The worst thing would be to meet someone who is as angry as you, or possibly even more possessed by rage, that could cause a confrontation on the road that may lead to an exchange of gestures, dangerous driving tactics or even physical violence.

It is choice that we need to exercise. When we are frustrated in heavy traffic we have a choice of how we're going to respond.

The types of responses available to us include:

- venting without retaliating
- venting with retaliating
- not venting, staying cool and objective
- not venting, doing something else

There are four degrees of escalating retaliation:

- **First Degree** - a single gesture, curse, or grimace delivered as punishment
- **Second Degree** - repeated exchanges of the same, together with diminished awareness of other sensory input, plus impaired judgement
- **Third Degree** - harassing the other driver through high beams, tailgating, retarding the progress of their vehicle, edging them over, or abruptly stopping in front of them. This has been called "Highway Madness"
- **Fourth Degree** - intentionally injuring the other driver's vehicle or person. Extreme road rage is defined as an assault with a motor vehicle or other dangerous weapon by the operator or passenger(s) of one motor vehicle on the operator or passenger(s) of another motor vehicle, or is caused by an incident that occurred on a roadway and is considered a criminal offence.

## Road Rage Test

Remember to answer honestly. Have you ever:

- Muttered about other drivers
- Got irritated while driving
- Got frustrated in traffic jams
- Tailgated when in a hurry
- Honked to express anger
- Drove in a rude manner
- Gave the 'finger' or other obscene gestures
- Took risks when angry or in a hurry
- Fought with another motorist
- Been charged with a 'road rage' type offence

Results - 4 or more yes's – Anger may be affecting your safety and health

## **Road Rage Statistics:**

PRNewswire reports that the number of road rage incidents increases by 7% per year. A recent survey by Farmers Insurance Group in the US revealed that nearly 15 percent of drivers admitted to intentionally having cut off other drivers or wanting to force them off in the previous 12 months. Of the 1,001 drivers surveyed, 14.3 percent said that they had shouted at or had gotten into a honking match with another motorist. Prince Market Research on behalf of Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. found that 22% of the men and 22% of women interviewed said they sometimes experience "road rage", in effect showing that road rage affects the genders equally.

Christer Gustafsson, Senior Safety Engineer at Volvo's head office in Gothenburg, Sweden stated "there comes a point when drivers must take personal responsibility for their actions. In the end, how we control our anger is the best offense/defence against this growing problem."

## **25 Tips For Keeping Your Commuting Cool**

1. Allow adequate time to get to your destination. Better to arrive early and safe. Do not obsess about the time
2. Avoid blaming - "This traffic is impossibly slow. What's wrong with these jerks, they're driving like idiots."
3. Have a plan for gridlock – jot down some notes, practise a speech, listen to your favourite music, use a portable tape cassette to dictate letters and messages
4. Learn – if you commute at least one hour per day, you are spending the equivalent of 30 class days per year in transit. Inspirational speakers and learning resources are available on tape to help you take advantage of this 'free' time
5. Learn to breathe deeply and often
6. Take frequent breaks on long distance travel to maintain alertness and concentration
7. Stop and nap if you start to feel tired to avoid dangerous driving and accidents
8. Proper posture can combat fatigue so adjust your seat accordingly
9. Slow down
10. Enjoy the humour and beauty around you

11. Do not take it personally – if so you may be ‘killing’ the wrong person’ – you are only harming yourself
12. Realize that anger is something that we choose - Avoid the "they make me so mad when they do that" syndrome
13. Avoid thinking only about oneself - "They better stay out of my way. I'm in no mood for putting up with them. Out of my way folks."
14. Act generously and be forgiving - Remember people do make mistakes
15. Do not be competitive - "Darn, that guy made the light and I didn't", "How come that lane is faster than this one"
16. Do not tailgate
17. If you are in the left lane and someone wants to pass, move over and let the other driver by
18. Do not retaliate
19. Do not make eye contact with an angry driver
20. Do not make inappropriate hand or facial gestures
21. Use your horn sparingly
22. Remain in your vehicle if a situation arises
23. If you are harassed by another driver and are being followed, do not go home. Go to the nearest police detachment
24. Let aggressive drivers stay ahead of you
25. The California Department of Motor Vehicles drafted a document on how best to avoid road rage and noted some less-common behaviours that should be noted like not driving slowly in the fast lane, making sure your signals are off after a turn is completed, making sure you are up to highway speed before merging and following parking lot etiquette

Remember that you cannot control the drivers around you, but you can control the way they affect your well-being. Be calm and drive safely. By preparing for your commute, keeping your expectations on-track and by not personalizing situations that happen around you, you will be able to arrive at your destination relaxed and prepared to focus on your next task.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit [www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com](http://www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com) for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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