

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My husband is usually mild-mannered, but when he's behind the wheel he acts like a jerk. During the summer months, the roads are jammed with tourists who are often lost. They plod along in the passing lane, change lanes without signaling, and then stop traffic as they look for street names. My husband screams out the window, flips them the bird, lays on the horn, jams down on the accelerator, and screeches around them. He's even tailgated one driver who ticked him off blasting the horn for almost a minute. I'm scared to ride with him.

-- Wife of an out-of-control driver

Dear Wife of out-of control,

Your normally sweet Dr. Jekyll husband becomes monster-man Mr. Hyde when he's on the road. His aggressive driving may cause a serious accident. This is a big problem, and I don't blame you for not wanting to ride with him. He needs to get a grip.

A recent study in Australia showed that more than half of all traffic accidents resulted from aggressive driving. A U.S. study conducted by the American Automobile Association says that accidents and even violent interactions – road rage -- between drivers are escalating dramatically every year.

First, stick with your intuition that tells you not to be a passenger with your husband until he gets this problem under control.

Your husband could definitely benefit from a stress management or relaxation class to learn how not to blow his stack every time a bad driver cuts him off or holds him up. In addition to that, here are some ideas for him:

One in four Americans admit to “aggressive driving” because they are running late. If your husband has to be somewhere at a certain time, he should leave extra time for traveling knowing that there's more traffic in the summer months. Your husband – and forty-five million other American drivers -- may be more patient if not feeling rushed.

Your husband can make the trip more relaxing by listening to some calming tapes or CDs of his favorite music. (But if his favorite music is loud heavy metal or thrash bands, he might want to stick to relaxation discs in the car!)

All of us drive in unfamiliar territory sometimes, so I guess that means we are all tourists depending upon where we are. Driving is a cooperative activity, like a team sport we engage in, hopefully all abiding by the same rules.

It sounds as though your husband is a bully to the visiting team when he has the home court advantage. He has no right to take his stress out on the other drivers no matter how badly they are driving.

And here is a tip for those drivers in unfamiliar territory (including your husband, when you are traveling). Experts who study road rage suggest that all drivers carry a sign with two to three inch high black letters that simply says “Sorry.” Eighty-five percent of road ragers said they would “drop the matter” – not tailgate with the horn blaring, or worse – if the other “careless” driver simply apologized.

Who knows? Such a sign could save your car, or your life, from the wrath of road ragers.

The most important thing we can do is to be patient. It makes no sense to get heartburn over something we can't control – such as traffic congestion.

Relax. Be mindful. Be patient. Be forgiving.

We can't control all of our experiences, but we do control (and are responsible for) our responses.

Whenever I'm feeling stressed out and angry I try to remember a BBC interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I heard a few years ago.

The reporter asked the Dalai Lama why he was not furious with the Chinese and why he didn't retaliate against them for forcibly occupying his homeland of Tibet.

In 1950, Chinese troops massacred thousands of innocent men, women and children, shelled Buddhist shrines and monasteries, and all but destroyed Tibetan culture.

The Dalai Lama was only fifteen years old when he escaped to exile in northern India on the back of a yak and across the treacherous Himalayan Mountains. He has lived there ever since where he has worked ceaselessly and non-violently to free the Tibetan people.

“Why do you call the Chinese ‘my friend, the enemy,’ and why are you not angry with these people?” the BBC reporter asked.

The Dalai Lama just smiled and said this, “They have already taken everything. Why then would I give them my mind as well?”

No one can take our mind. No one – no matter how careless, annoying, or evil – can turn us into monsters, or make us violent and hateful. We have control over our minds and our behavior

It's no wonder this gentle man won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1989 for his non-violent approach to the world. Can't we be even just a little bit more like that? Can't we strive to be little bit more forgiving, tolerant, and patient with things as ultimately meaningless as traffic delays?

These are questions for your husband -- and others who take out their anger on the roads -- to think about...maybe while he's stuck in traffic?

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.