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Dangerous Driving

By Carole Spiers (PRESSURE GAUGE)

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ALTHOUGH I AM now back in London behind my writing desk, last week I was in Dubai coaching senior business executives on managing their workplace stress.

 Having several sessions in one day at different locations, was quite a challenge in order for me to be on time for each appointment - but it did work!

So what did I do to ensure I could cope with my stress levels in view of the notorious Dubai traffic problem? Quite simply I allowed for an extra half an hour in between each appointment to ensure that I was never late. If my taxi driver failed to show-up or if the traffic was particularly heavy over Al Maktoum bridge or on Shaikh Zayed Road, I could still remain calm and relaxed instead of being stressed-out and frustrated.

And now, news has just reached me this week that the Dubai Road Transport Authority (RTA) has launched a one-year Road Safety Awareness Programme to counter the appalling death toll on the city's roads.

Apparently 236 people died in car accidents in Dubai last year; due to bad habits such as holding mobile phones whilst driving, reading or writing at the wheel, not wearing seat belts, speeding, aggressive driving, not keeping to lanes, jumping red signals, lack of concentration and impatience - being just some of the reasons underlying the increasing accident toll on the roads.

Aggressive driving includes behaviour such as using the horn to express anger at other drivers, driving too fast, parking or double parking so as to cause an obstruction.

Sure

If this sounds like you or if you regularly suffer 'road rage', then my advice is that you need to learn to use the 'SAFE' driver model and become a driver who is Sure, Accepting, Focused and Ego-free.

As a 'SAFE' driver you need to be sure of your vehicle, your journey and yourself. You should be confident that your car is roadworthy and mechanically sound.

You also need to be sure of exactly where you are going as Dubai is changing so fast that the route you were going to take might have changed, new roads have been constructed and there are new speed limits.

You also should never drive when you are tired and, most importantly, you must NEVER drive when you have been taking medication that could slow your reactions.

Accepting

The list of 'stressors' that can cause frustration to drivers during a journey is almost endless. There is, however, one thing that makes each of these instances less challenging and that is acceptance. When you accept that there will be situations over which you have no control, you will find them to be less stressful and that applies particularly when driving.

Try it on your next journey. When events seem to be going against you, don't blame, shout or swear, just be accepting instead. Accepting becomes easier when you are skilled enough to use your experience to anticipate another driver's actions.

You know, for example, that it is quite usual for an older driver to seem overly cautious at a junction, or for a 'boy racer' to take more risks. Use this knowledge. Adjust your thoughts and your driving accordingly and you will find such incidents to be less stressful.

Focused

For many people, a vehicle which they own becomes an extension of their home - their personal space. It also has in-car entertainment and a phone. While this may be comfortable and convenient, it does not help the driver to focus on their driving or keep their concentration. A momentary lapse is long enough to make an error and that error can be fatal.

To help you stay alert and focused you need to: avoid distractions take regular breaks do not drive when tired avoid all but urgent phone calls

Ego-free

Ever since they were invented, vehicles have been far more than a means of transport. A vehicle, it seems, makes a statement about you and your lifestyle. and in a bid to live up to your self image, speed is sometimes above the legal limit.

Behind this behaviour lies the ego. The ego makes you reckless enough to jump the lights and is dented when you are overtaken, and seeks revenge when you are 'cut-up'. Your ego feels bruised if you are made to wait in a traffic jam and your journey is delayed. It is also not pleased when a smaller car pushes in front of you.



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So next time you drive along the road to Jebel Ali or Deira, try leaving your ego at home.

Although there are many situations on the road over which you will have no control, you do have full control over your own thoughts and responses. Your responses are a direct result of your thoughts, and your thoughts are your own. You don't have to become aggressive when driving. You can choose other responses. Be understanding if another driver makes a mistake. Acknowledge your own mistakes and apologise accordingly. It will keep stress levels down, and it will help you to be SAFE.

Carole Spiers, the UK's leading Guru on corporate stress-management and organisational change, is also a

regular BBC broadcaster and international author on these major, business issues. She is also a regular motivational speaker at UAE conferences. Your questions and input on this article or any related topic, is welcomed. Each Friday, we will discuss a selection of your letters or case-studies. Please write to Carole Spiers at: ktwkd@emirates.net.ae. Website: www.carolespiersgroup.com



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