



Conflicts Are Just Like Driving a Car

The other day, while driving to the mall to do some Christmas shopping, I couldn't help but think about conflict. Coincidence? Maybe.

I noticed that there are similarities in how we drive and in how we deal with each other at work. So I thought I would share some of my observations with you in the hope that we can all become better drivers and conflict communicators.

Changing Lanes

When driving, how do you let other people know of your intention to change lanes? Pretty simple - you use your turn signal.

And how do you feel when other drivers don't use their turn signals?

You are usually shocked, angry or scared when they start to move into your lane. And you let those feelings influence your thoughts.

You may start to make assumptions. You may assume that the other driver didn't use their turn signal on purpose. It's as if that particular driver woke up that morning with the sole purpose of causing you stress.

What you fail to realize is that the driver probably did not intend to make you feel mad, scared or embarrassed. They simply needed to get into your lane.

So what do you normally do? - honk your horn or maybe some other physical act involving fingers. Now, the other driver feels angry or embarrassed. And a circle of bad feelings is created.

Making Positive Assumptions

What if you were able to talk to that driver? And I don't mean in a confrontational way, but in a curious way. You may not be so angry. You may discover that they were preoccupied with thoughts of an ill relative or that they are a new driver or that it was not their intention to create a dangerous situation. You may still feel upset, but with this new information, you now have a choice - continue to be mad, or forgive and simply move on.

Now because, you can't conveniently talk to other drivers, why not make the assumption that the other driver was preoccupied, or was inexperienced?

After all, we have all made mistakes while driving.

By giving the other driver the benefit of the doubt, you are actually giving yourself a gift! You might not take the act of their car coming into your lane so personally and will probably be able to get through the situation with a lot less anger.

In our day-to-day interactions at work, we do have the luxury of being able to talk to each other, but it is still a gift for us to give the other person the benefit of the doubt before making assumptions that are incorrect.

Signal Your Intentions

Just like a signal of your intention to change lanes is always appreciated while driving, a 'signal' of your intentions is always appreciated in a difficult conversation.

So, how can you 'signal' your intentions?

You first have to think about the following:

- What is important to you? Is it respect, fairness, trust, etc?
- What specific actions make you feel respected, trusted, etc?
- What is motivating you to have the discussion?
- What do you hope to gain from the conversation?
- What do you want the other person to walk away with after the conversation?

Once you have this info, you need to share it with the other person.

The more information the other person has, the better they will be able understand the motivation for your actions. They might still not agree with your actions, but they may accept your perspective.

And that is a very important part of getting to a resolution.

So the next time you are using your turn signal while driving, make yourself a promise to 'signal' your intentions the next time you have a difficult conversation.

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