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## Driving Defensively

Rude drivers have taken their behavior to another level in the 21st century. Gone are the days when changing lanes without signaling was considered a bad offense and might be greeted with a honk of a horn or wave of a fist.

As highways become more crowded, traffic backups get longer, and people seem to be in more of a hurry than ever, incidents where drivers lose control and become extremely aggressive have skyrocketed. The rate of "aggressive driving" incidents -- defined as when an angry or impatient driver tries to kill or injure another driver after a traffic dispute -- more than doubled between between 1990 and 2002, according to the American Automobile Association.

So, more than ever, when you get behind the wheel of a car, you have to do more than watch the road in front of you. You have to always be aware of the surrounding traffic, and constantly scan for people who may be driving erratically.

By taking a defensive approach to driving, you can help prevent getting into an accident or altercation with other people on the road. It also makes you safer to other drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

### The Other Guy

Whenever we get behind the wheel, we're accepting some amount of risk, especially considering that we have little control over the actions of other drivers. Driving defensively means not only taking responsibility for yourself and your actions but also keeping an eye on "the other guy."

Don't trust the other driver to do what you think he is going to do, or what you would do in his place. For example, when his turn signal is flashing, don't assume that he will make a turn. Plan ahead and decide what to do if he doesn't turn as well as if he does. Don't assume that every driver will stop when there is a stop sign or a red light. Some drivers deliberately "run" stop signs and traffic lights; others may be daydreaming.

Here are some other defensive driving techniques:

- Give driving your full attention. Avoid distractions such as your cell phone, radio, other drivers, or sights along the road.
- Watch for drivers that may lack skill or have an improper attitude.
- Learn to drive in different situations like highway driving, night driving, or bad weather.
- Have knowledge about the emergency situations like skidding or tire blowout.
- Be alert for accident-producing situations in advance to take defensive action.
- Make sure you car is in working order, especially all lights and the emergency flashers.
- Give up the right of way to prevent an accident.
- Obey all rules of the road.

-- Kenneth Krause

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