



Attitude Can Make the Difference between Accident Avoidance...or Catastrophe

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I've been in the transportation claims business for over 35 years and, during that time, I've probably handled or overseen the payment of about a billion dollars in claims. That daunting total includes a lot of payments below \$500 for very minor injuries, but also includes altogether too many settlements or jury verdicts involving very serious injuries and fatalities. In some cases, the driver of the commercial vehicle was only partially at fault. In others, the driver was completely at fault and sometimes was in jail at the time of the case's resolution. Many involved "He said/She said" red light/green light cases, and others involved pretty clear evidence of fraud committed by the alleged injured party.

I wish I could find the single most common thread in all of these cases. If I could, maybe

there would be a way to substantially reduce their frequency and severity. Ultimately, our analysis reveals that there are many causes of accidents; some driver related, some vehicle related and some a function of the environment, such as inoperable traffic lights or missing stop signs. However, one clearly evident theme in many of these cases can be easily recognized; driver attitude.

When the work day begins and the professional driver is making one last check in the mirror before he or she gets behind the wheel, what's reflected back is more than just a smartly pressed shirt and a smile. That reflection includes an attitude, perhaps the single most important factor in what will happen while driving that day.

The Multi-faceted Contributions to Attitude

Attitude includes multiple components; how drivers feel about their job, protecting the vehicle they've been entrusted to drive, the health, safety and well-being of their passengers; and how they choose to act and interact with and around other drivers.

Let's look at these one at a time.

How drivers feel about their job relates to that old "Joy in Work" concept that is sometimes elusive to employers. There is a bottom-line here though based on my experience, and that is, if you don't like your job, you're less likely to get through the day of driving without at least one event at which you were not fully aware of your surroundings or made the right choice.



Driving Professionally in the Road Rage Era

You're more likely to drift into a moment of thinking about where you'd rather be working, leading to inattention and the risk of a bad thing happening. What's the solution for this one? Drivers need to work through the solution, and are encouraged to talk to their bosses about what they're feeling. Companies need to take the temperature of driver's attitudes towards their satisfaction with their job. That means listening, carefully, to what's being said.

The next area I mentioned is gauging how the driver feels about protecting that often very expensive piece of machinery he/she's been asked to operate. Does it matter to you, the driver, if you pull just a bit too close to the car in front of you while parking and put a "ding", albeit small, in the bumper cover? Does

it matter if you drink from a beverage without a top? Do you care enough to slow down on rough roads to avoid the need for an early front-end alignment? Companies and drivers should have an expectation that the vehicle will be treated the same way as the driver would treat his/her own vehicle or property. But, sometimes that's not good enough as people sometimes have a tendency to not treat their own property particularly well. Drivers need to remember that the vehicle is their workspace, their office and, though they may not own it, the way it looks and the condition it's in matters a whole lot to the person that gave them the keys. And, it should matter to the driver as well as that presentation and image the vehicle makes is a direct reflection on the driver and his/her company.

Protecting the lives of passengers is of course, the most important job drivers are asked to do. Each and every time there is a pick-up, the drivers are in a position to make a choice. Will I drive in consideration of the well-being of my passengers or will I drive taking chances and outside of what I know and have been taught are safe operating practices? What will your attitude be when the traffic is heavy, the trip to the airport is behind schedule, the passengers are upset and taking out their frustrations on you and the trip is uncomfortable for all involved? It makes sense for drivers to become angry and upset when this happens, but, it's also an imperative that in no way does this affect driving. This element of attitude touches many other areas: Do I chance that stale green? Do I make that lane change without really knowing what's next to me? Do I drop off passengers in an area that could be unsafe? Every decision you make while driving is in some way an accounting of what your attitude is towards your passengers. If you care a lot, you just might get through your career without ever being the subject of an insurance claims file. If you don't care as much as you should, you're more likely to be part of the

billion dollars spent by me or someone in my position.

The final area I'll touch on is professional driver attitude towards the motoring public. In this era of road rage incidents, it's apparent that tempers are shorter, time and space (the kind you occupy) matter much more to people and drivers of private passenger autos are more likely to be distracted by an electronic device that causes them to do something stupid and dangerous. Professional drivers when they slide behind the wheel, need to make an attitude check to ensure they're committed to driving defensively, willing to give up time and space if there's a risk of a collision and will hold in check their reaction to the bad acts of others. That means not speeding up and shaking your fist at drivers who cut you off, not speeding up to beat a truck into a construction zone, yielding when you're supposed to and backing only when you're sure it's clear. Those are just a few of the driver actions that relate to your attitude towards other drivers. You can easily add dozens more to the list, but what matters here is that



you recognize that the choices you make thousands of times while driving, all relate in some way to your attitude towards others.

If you choose to make the left turn without being certain you won't get struck by an oncoming car, or if you are on the phone and blow through a stop sign, you've displayed the kind of attitude that is highly likely to make you the subject of the claim files I've referred to. And that is never a good thing. And some of the time, it's a tragic end to life for others, and an end to your way of life as you navigate criminal charges, the search for a new job, and maybe a lifetime of guilt.

It's Never Too Late for an Attitude Adjustment

The sole goal of my observations is to present a perspective that will hopefully reduce the risk of accidents. Books have been written detailing the components of effective driver training, safety operations, maintenance practices and all of the things that go into running a successful passenger transportation company. Sometimes though, it's important to take a look at some of the things, like attitude, that perhaps have a far bigger impact on accident avoidance than we might think.

Attitude matters.

Thanks for taking the time to read the ranting of an old Claims Warhorse that has seen too much of the dark side of the business you're in. I'm proud to be part of the passenger transportation world, and I hope there's at least one thing, maybe just a small thing, that you take away from this that will make a difference to the well-being and success of all hard-working, professional drivers that are committed to maintaining a good attitude...all of the time.



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