The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Why Creating Driving Rules Can Be Compared to Parenting

By Clare Taylor

December 05, 2012



Hallelujah! Rejoice, brothers and sisters, for this morning what is nominally five marked lanes where I join the highway on the journey to drop my husband at the nearest metro station became not six, not seven, not eight, but nine lanes of tailgate-to-bumper traffic. I think — I think — that is a record. I'm used to counting sixes and sevens and, on occasion, eights, but today was the first time in three years that I've seen a nine.

The only silver lining was that for once my husband was driving, thank the Lord. This in itself is unusual on a weekday and has been so for most of our sojourn here. It's not that he can't drive, or doesn't like to, more that invariably I am dropping him somewhere so it makes sense for him to be able to hop out of the passenger seat quickly. Given, you know, the traffic (did I mention that already?) and everything.

Being driven by my husband through the morning rush hour was an interesting experience. I wouldn't say I manage to achieve a zen-like state of calm when behind the wheel these days,

but petty annoyances like a big SUV edging in front of me, the truck and minivan that have collided in the center lane forcing the traffic to execute complicated balletic maneuvers around them, or the predatory *politsia* lying in wait at the edge of the road for the unwary driver moving into the bus lane too early, all of these things are now simple facts of life for me. You just have to suck it up if you want to sit behind the wheel in Moscow and let it all wash over you. Put some easy-listening radio on and simply get on with it.

My husband, however, has not had quite such a long apprenticeship as a rush-hour driver in this city. (Why would he, when muggins here will do it for the price of having the car all day?) So as you can imagine, his running commentary on the state of the road was a little less relaxed that mine normally is. It was after his rantings (and no, I don't think that is too strong a word) on the matter of yet another lane being created out of nowhere by chancing-it drivers that I suggested perhaps he didn't drive enough here. This was also when I commented that the road system in Russia is just like a chicken-and-egg situation.

What did I mean by that? Well, there are various draconian rules and regulations here such as those about not turning left, not crossing an unbroken white line unless you want a fine, not crossing an unbroken double white line on pain of death, or not overtaking on a bridge or in a tunnel (no matter that they may be six lanes wide). After much study time spent in jams pondering this situation, it recently occurred to me that this authoritarian approach may be counter-productive. Drivers here are, you see, famously resourceful and will find any way they can to speed their journey up. Like, for example, the aforementioned impromptu creation of additional lanes on the highway. Or the not infrequent sight of a car reversing down the hard shoulder of a motorway because it has missed its turning. Or even better, seeing a car reversing back onto the motorway because it's turned off too early. I'm told that none of these things are actually illegal — unless they cause an accident, of course — so they are "respectable" driving tactics in some people's minds.

But it seems to me that the road chaos is the result of an impasse. It's a bit like being a parent, really; if you assume your child is untrustworthy and will behave badly unless you rule them with a rod of iron, chances are that the moment they are let off the leash, that's exactly what they'll do. So it is with the roads in Moscow: It could be argued that the authorities have imposed a set of rules that assume the average driver is something of an idiot and unable to think for themselves.

But because the law assumes the average driver is an idiot and unable to make a rational decision about whether it is safe to overtake or turn left, guess what some people behave like the first opportunity they get?

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/12/05/why-creating-driving-rules-can-be-compared-to-parenting-a34740