
Anybody Need a Ride?

This summer I had the opportunity to speak on a cruise ship. This was my first cruise, and I had a great time with my client. In addition to the work, I had the opportunity to enjoy some rest and relaxation with my wife before we got off the ship. Although I enjoyed the cruise, my aggressive personality was ready to get off the boat after five days at sea.

Since this was our first cruise, we had no idea what time we'd actually get off the boat the morning we were scheduled to disembark, so we didn't make arrangements for ground transportation to the airport. But since we were in New York, we felt certain there would be a line of yellow cabs stretched around the block ready to greet the thousands of people getting off the boat. We were wrong.

By the time we got from the ship to the cab station, several hundred people were waiting for a cab. There was no line of yellow cabs stretched around the corner. In fact, about every five minutes a single cab would pull up to load the next group in line. I quickly did the math, and realized it would take approximately three days to get a cab at that pace. My aggressive personality was looking for options. At that point, I didn't care if someone had a motorcycle and sidecar. I wanted out of that terminal.

About that time, I heard a voice shout out, "Anybody need a ride?" I turned to see a tall man walking toward the line looking for two passengers headed to New York's La Guardia airport. He had four passengers, and needed two more to fill his limousine parked across the street. This was not a difficult decision for me. He had a car. I needed a way out of this line. I was all over it. Here I was thinking I would be happy with a motorcycle and sidecar, and now we're headed to a limousine! This was much better than the motorcycle and sidecar. We were wrong, again.

As the six of us approached the car across the street, I remembered thinking to myself two things. First, "Has this man spray painted the entire car?" And second, "How is he going to get the luggage of six people who just spent a week on a cruise ship into the trunk of this car?" I was never able to answer the first question, but the answer to the second question became clear as he removed a large rope from the trunk. That's right. After stuffing the luggage into the trunk with the lid still open, he tied down our luggage with the giant rope. The Beverly Hillbillies had arrived in New York.

As we piled into the car one by one, we realized the inside of the car was no prize either. There was no air conditioning, and it smelled like dirty socks. I leaned forward and asked the driver if he'd ever lost any baggage from his trunk, and he replied with a smile, "Never. But then again, I've never tried this either!"

After what may have been the hottest and more embarrassing ride of my life, we arrived at the airport. Much to our delight we learned that none of our luggage was strewn along the highway. After unloading our bags (and taking a quick picture with our new friend Gabriel),

we were headed home long before many of our fellow passengers who were still waiting in line at the ship's terminal. On the flight home, I couldn't help but reflect on the lessons I learned from Gabriel that day, including:

Do the best with what you have

There is no shortage of nice ground transportation in New York. A lesser man may have said, "There is no way I can drive this beat-up car around New York and make a living." Gabriel did the best with what he had. Every day we have the opportunity to take chances and try new things, but we hold ourselves back because we think we can't do it with what we have. "I've never been trained to do that job, so I would never be selected even if I applied." Take what skills you have and do the best with what you have.

Go make it happen

There are over 12,000 yellow cabs in New York driving around hoping to find a passenger. You would think someone would send a few hundred to the cruise ship terminal for the bazillion people who were standing in line waiting to pay for a ride to the airport. Gabriel knew where the "demand" would be, and his experience told him there wouldn't be much "supply". He was determined to go find some new customers that day, and he went out and made it happen. Much of our success is determined by our willingness to stop sitting around and waiting for someone to bring us the next opportunity. Go out and make it happen.

Make it fun

Gabriel knew what he had to offer was transportation to the airport. He provided the same service as other drivers in the city, but his product was not as nice as others. He chose to make up for it by having fun with his passengers. It may not have been the nicest mode of ground transportation in New York, but it was certainly memorable! It's amazing how often we'll forgive mediocre food if we have a great waiter. Whether you offer the best service or not, make it fun for those who choose to be around you.

As I've written on many occasions, we all have experiences every day that can provide a world of lessons if we're willing to learn from them. Some of our fellow passengers in the car that day complained all the way to the airport, and are probably still complaining about it today. I encourage you to look for the lessons in all your experiences ... especially the bad ones. And if you're in New York anytime soon and see a black spray-painted limousine, tell our friend Gabriel we said hello! Here's to the next lesson.

God bless!

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