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## Non-Verbal Communication

by  
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“Howdy,” at least for some of my neighbors who read last week’s column has become the word of the day for greeting. For those who didn’t read the column shame on you. I mentioned that the word howdy was used by folks from my former neighborhood in West Virginia. Depending on voice volume and inflection used when speaking to a neighbor, that one word could communicate a variety of feelings and attitudes. I mentioned that this week I would cover acceptable forms of non-verbal communication one can use while driving down the street in whatever neighborhood you might live.

With so many in The Villages who are out walking the streets it’s important to know how to acknowledge their presence. It is equally important to adjust your form of acknowledgement to the direction they are walking, of course, so they can respond to you. For instance, if the person or persons was walking in the same direction you were driving I hope you can see how a wave would be totally wasted. The side of the road upon which they are walking is also important in the type of acknowledgement and we will briefly cover the rules covering that contingency as well.

One thought just went through my head... aren’t you amazed at the number of walkers who frequent the streets? All these husband and wife duos out each morning briskly walking because at the top of their list of “*things we will do together when we move South*” was the item 1) Walk daily to become healthier. Have you noted that not too many months later it’s usually the wife walking by herself, or with a neighbor lady because the husbands have succumbed to the draw of the golf courses? C’mon guys... get with it. But I digress... back to the non-verbal communication skills.

As one would guess, driving a 4,000 pound vehicle down the street at an average speed of, let’s say, 10-15 mph in neighborhoods vs. 45-50 mph on the more frequently traveled byways, doesn’t allow a whole heck-of-a-lot of time to get their attention, make your acknowledgement, receive their response, and proceed down the street, so you’ve got to know what you’re going to do before confronted with the situation. It kinda takes away the whole meaning of the thing if you have to slow down while waiting for their response so be ready, keeping your eyes peeled down the street for oncoming, or ongoing pedestrians.

The obvious means of acknowledging walkers on the street would be blowing the horn... not loudly, but just a slight tap. This is especially effective with those walking with their backs to you. Unfortunately, it’s almost impossible these days to just tap your horn and get a sound from it? I spend a good ten seconds pounding leather before I get any response at all from the horn...

and by that time the walkers are long gone. (Oh, for the good old days when large rings of metal were on the steering wheel and never failed to honk with just a slight push.)

The best and most widely used means of communication, determined by a very un-official private survey is the wave. However, as those familiar with this act know, there are many hybrids to this method of greeting... each with its own subtle meaning. I will list ten of those I am most familiar with but I don't have the space to delineate their entire meaning. Keep in mind these are from a male point of view.

- 1- A full hand wave with arm raised. (The original)
- 2- Full hand raised while doffing your hat... (*Dangerous for the driver and the walkers*)
- 3- Doffing the hat without the wave (*Thought to be somewhat Victorian and thus outdated*)
- 4- Touching finger to hat's brim and stroke forward. (*Not effective if not wearing hat*)
- 5- Hand on steering wheel while raising three fingers as you pass. (*Somewhat friendly*)
- 6- Hand on steering wheel and raising two fingers as you pass. (*More friendly*)
- 7- Hand on steering wheel and raising index finger. (*Most friendly, however, it is important not to raise the wrong finger lest your intentions be misunderstood.*)
- 8- Lifting of the chin and backward nod of the head. (*Indicates friendly attitude while keeping driving hand firmly on the wheel. Important to nod head backward, not forward.*)
- 9- Lifting chin with backward nod of the head and eyebrows raised as well. (*Indicates friendly attitude and conveys desire to get to know them better.*)
- 10- Quick flashing of headlights (*Usually more effective after dark but wasteful motion since no one, especially those walking away from you will know who you are.*)

I'm sure there are those out there who have their own forms of greeting walkers while driving past them and I hope you can adapt one or more of the above to your collection. The important thing is to be friendly to all you meet.

In closing, I received an e-mail from an individual who is renting here in the Villages and says that we permanent residents seem to treat renters with disdain or we just outright ignore them. He indicated he perceived our community as an unfriendly one and had talked to other renters who felt the same. The only person who can change that perception is you... the one who comes into contact with renters in your neighborhood each day. Make them want to be part of this community by your outward sign of friendship and welcome and invite them to participate in your activities. You know what to do...go out and hug a renter today.

See you next week.

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