

ADVICE TO TAXI & PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS

1) Keep in contact with the Operator.

The most important pieces of equipment in your taxi is your radio or PDA as it connects you to your dispatcher. The dispatcher is "your lifeline".

They are the ones who will get you help if you are in trouble. They are the ones who will "sense" when you are in trouble and get assistance to you.

2) Be alert and aware.

You must keep yourself alert and aware of what is going on around you at all times, whether you are parked or driving. You must remain alert to who may be around you when you are parked on the street or at a rank. You should keep the doors locked whilst waiting for fares; this will prevent offenders from sneaking up and making a surprise attack.

3) Do not flash or display your money.

Do not wear any type of expensive watch, neck chains, or wrist bracelets. If you do, you may be providing motivation for the person to rob you. If you must wear a neck chain, make sure that it is very thin so that it will break before it can strangle you. Ensure that you keep a minimum amount of money on you. If your passenger offers you a large denomination note, advise him you will take him to get it changed at a nearby store. DO NOT show him that you have money to change it.

4) Size up your passenger - assess risk.

Most passengers will pose some level of risk to you. Read them - assess them, then act accordingly. Remember this point: ***Never underestimate anybody !***

5) Greet-and maintain eye contact with the fare when picking up

It is essential that you make eye contact with each and every one of your passengers, try to do it as they are entering your vehicle. The reason is simple: To greet them as a customer and send a subtle message to them: "I see you - you see me - I can therefore now identify you.

When you don't even bother to look at them, you send a message to them- you don't care about them, and that you are very careless and unaware. It cannot be emphasised enough how important it is for you to make eye contact with each and every passenger.

6) Know the town.

One of the key causes of disputes and arguments is in not knowing your way around the town and taking your customers by the wrong route. This will get them angry, and disputes can quickly turn into assaults, or worse. It is very important that you study and remember all the routes and streets so that you minimise any negative action by the customer.

7) Trust your instincts.

All your life while you grew up you learned things and stored the experiences in your mind. These learned experiences make up our "data" banks. These banks are what cause your "instincts" to react. These reactions are very real. Your gut instinct will be right 99% of the time. Listen to what your body is telling you!

8) Know emergency procedures

Each taxi company should have in place a set of emergency procedure rules, for use in different circumstances. These rules vary from company to company and you must make an effort to learn them. They are not there for the company, but are for you and your personal safety. Learn what the trouble call signals are.

9) Always keep your windows up...

Not all the way up, just open enough so that you can speak to people and get air, but they cannot get their hand through the window to grab your hair or body and pull you out of the car or bang your head against the glass to stun you.

10) Always keep your doors locked.

This is extremely important if you are sitting at a rank, or on the street. Often you may be reading a paper or book while waiting for that next fare; you don't want someone to come up beside you on foot without you noticing them and jerking open your door and attacking you. This also provides you the method to force the customer into the rear seats if you wish, or to ensure they sit on the right side of the rear seat, not behind you if at all possible. This particular point may cause some concern as crime reduction advice to persons worried about travelling in taxi's alone is to sit directly behind the driver, so a certain amount of negotiation and empathy may be required should this situation arise. The idea is not to be taken by surprise.

11) Be extra careful late at night

The most dangerous hours to operate in are between 10:00 pm in the evening and 6:00 am in the morning. In particular, the darkest hours between 12:00 midnight and 04:00 am. Most assaults and robberies committed against taxi drivers occur during these late hours. At this time of the night, there a few people around as witnesses and many of your customers will have been drinking. And of course we all know, most criminals prefer to conduct their business in the dark hours. Even though these can be your most tiring hours, you cannot afford to be careless and unaware. You must maintain a high state of alertness during these periods of time.

12) Be aware of passengers who give you "vague" instructions

It is of utmost importance that you insist on your customer giving you a "fixed destination" as to where they are going, before you start driving away. Some customers may say, take me to "whatever" street or give an uncertain destination. Try to make them give you an exact address.

If they are unsure and balk, read this as a sign that you should be very alert to what they are up to. If they tell you to "just start driving - we will tell you the way", this is a classic danger signal to you. Do not move and politely advise them that the "company's policy" requires you to get an exact address.

Then when they do give it to you or what is alleged to be the address, use your radio to advise the dispatcher of the destination address. This will serve three purposes: it will alert the dispatcher you have a problem, it will appear that you are telling the truth about company policy, and it will give the passenger the understanding that your dispatcher and others know where you are going. If the passengers still refuse, refuse the fare.

Should the passengers suddenly direct you to take a different route or turn here-turn there routine, this is a danger sign and you should immediately alert your dispatcher to the change of address.

13) Be careful of passenger seated behind you

Try not to allow single passengers to sit behind you if at all possible. 80% of all assaults are launched from the seat directly behind the driver. You cannot see behind you. Ask the person to move over to the right side of the seat, use any excuse, i.e.: to balance the car, company policy, or whatever you need, but politely get them to move. Buy a convex rear view mirror that replaces or fits over the regular one. This will allow you 100% back seat visibility. It also sends a message to the customer that you can see them. See contradiction in item 10.

14) Keep an eye on suspicious passengers

Depending on the risk level that you have assessed your customer at, you want to keep some type of watch over them while they are in your taxi. When you feel very uncomfortable or suspicious of your passengers then make absolutely sure to "keep watch" on them. Your body and mind are telling you to pay attention to these individuals so listen to them and do so. We must always, of course, be diplomatic and mind our own business in most instances when we have passengers who we consider very low risk.

15) Never tell customers you had a good shift

Never ever tell an inquiring customer that you have had a good day and made a lot of trips or money. If they ask, reply along the lines of, "I only got started an hour ago and it's been pretty slow, or "it's really been dead today, you are the first fare in over an hour." Be polite, but evasive. Most people just want to make conversation, so they say "how is your day going, made a few quid today" or "Have you been really busy, I hope so." Many people mean well, they know you work long, hard hours, and they are sincere in hoping you are doing OK. On the other hand they may be "sounding you out" to see if you are worth robbing. Gently try to change the subject without being impolite or nasty.

16) Never drive into alleys or back lanes

Never do this if at all possible. Tell your customer that company policy states "no back lanes or alleys". Some persons want you to go there for one reason: to get you out of sight where they can assault or rob you. If you must, then back into the alley, or lane, do not get out of your taxi, use the push button control to open the boot if need be. Keep your vehicle running, in drive gear, this way if things go bad you can simply accelerate out of harm's way. Make the passengers get their own property from the boot. Do not exit the taxi - if you do, you give them the chance to attack you. Once you are away from the area, you can stop, get out and close the boot lid.

17) Know your location at all times.

This is very important to be able to tell someone where you are in case you get into trouble. Nobody can help you if they do not know where you are when you call for help. It is suggested that as you drive, make a mental note of each street you turn onto, read the street signs. The last thing you have seen is what you usually remember.

18) Do not be aggressive or argumentative.

This type of behaviour will always cause you a lot of problems, and may help escalate a minor disagreement into a violent confrontation, with you being the loser most of the time. Stay calm and controlled.

You cannot think if you lose control.

19) DO NOT RESIST a robbery (co-operate)

The best advice we can give you. Offer no resistance - just comply with the offender. If you resist you are going to escalate the situation drastically and you may be injured or even worse. It is just not worth it.

20) Communicate with your dispatcher

When the robbery is finished, or you are able to, immediately call your dispatcher with the trouble code, your call sign, and your exact location. You want the world to know where you are, especially the other drivers on your radio channel so they can help you. It is most important that you give your location in a very clear, concise matter, so that you are understood by all. If they cannot understand you, they cannot help you.

21) Do not threaten

In your taxi, you must maintain control at all times of both yourself and the situation at hand. Never ever threaten any person with violence if they won't pay, can't pay, or are acting up. If you do this, you will most probably provoke a most unpleasant occurrence in which most cases, you will be the loser. You can always work your way out of a problem or harm if you think it out first. If you lose your temper, you lose control, and that is when you get into trouble.

22) Memorise the suspect's description

When the attack or robbery is finished, immediately take pen or pencil and write down everything you can remember about the suspect, so that you can make a good witness for the police. Try to remember these details: sex, race, age, height, weight, hair colour and style, eye colour, scars or tattoo's, body marks, glasses, facial hair, voice - high/low, accented, ethnic, stuttering or other voice defects. The clothing, jacket, shirt, pants, shoes, and last but not least the type of weapon used, and exactly what the suspect said to you. If you can do this while your memory is fresh, it will greatly help in the apprehension of the suspect and his/her subsequent conviction.