

ETIQUETTE

THE TRAVELERS' NINE COMMANDMENTS ARE A TIMELESS GUIDE TO NOT OFFENDING YOUR NEIGHBORS. BY MAURA GRABER.

While leafing through a book on the history of California, I came across an unusual but practical list for stagecoach travelers, distributed by Wells-Fargo. The list is the "Stagecoach Riders' Nine Commandments."

It is outdated, yet also timeless. Even though buffalo robes (provided for comfort during cold weather) are no longer in style, good manners always are.

The list aimed to make everyone comfortable on what I'm sure must have been a very uncomfortable journey to California. The aforementioned buffalo robes were apparently one of the few comforts provided.

According to Commandment #4, "Hogging robes will not be tolerated and the offender will be made to ride with the driver."

Imagine the faces of today's airline pilots if they were forced to share the cockpit with a passenger caught hogging all the overhead bin space! No, I don't think that rule has transcended time gracefully.

But how about Commandment #5? "Don't snore loudly [this is something actually controllable?] while sleeping, or use your fellow passenger's shoulder for a pillow. He or she may not understand and friction may result."

That shoulder-sleeping part I really like, and I believe that every passenger boarding a plane should get something in print on how to behave graciously in flight. Busses and trains could use them, too.

Of course, today you probably will get into some sort of grey area if you used the words "Commandments" when distributing something. Even while trying to promote goodwill

and comfort for all, religious and non-religious groups alike might feel slighted by the religious overtones of the Biblical "commandments," so one would have to be careful as to what they were titled.

"Suggestions" is too tame a word. "Requests" and "Recommendations" sound too weak. "Directions" and "Instructions" are usually the two words that signal passengers to stop listening because they think they're going to learn about oxygen masks and seat-flotation devices for possibly the umpteenth time.

How about "Rules"? It's short, gets right to the point and gives a sense of structure to the matter at hand. I like it.

Now if the travel industry was to come up with "Rules," what else might they be able to borrow from the "Nine Commandments"?

Well, Commandment #6 should be scratched from the running: "Firearms may be kept on your person for use in emergencies. Do not fire them for pleasure or shoot at wild animals as the sound riles the horses."

How about #9?: "Gents guilty of

unchivalrous behavior toward lady passengers will be put off the stage. It's a long walk back. A word to the wise is sufficient." Substitute "anyone" for "gents" and "any" for "lady," and this rule would work. And substituting the word "drop" for "walk" would add that fear-inducing element ensuring compliance.

Commandment #2 is out for the airline industry. "...Chewing tobacco is permitted, but spit with the wind, not against it."

Commandment #8 might make a nice addition to the list: "For-

bidden topics of discussion are stagecoach robberies and Indian uprisings."

Replace with the topics of plane crashes and hijackings and you've got a real winner!

Commandment #1 is also timely: "Abstinence from liquor is requested. If you must drink, share your bottle; otherwise you will appear to be selfish and

unneighborly." That is what manners are all about—being neighborly.

Maura Graber is director of the R.S.V.P. Institute of Etiquette in Ontario.

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