

## FREEWAY: BEING STUCK!

We created this series of vignettes to look at the issue of how an individual “copes” using the four modes, with a variety of situations involving “being stuck” on your path. As an abstract universal issue this involves the following:

- a) being stuck in a situation on your way toward a goal
- b) having limited information about how long you will be stuck if you stay on the same path
- c) seeing some alternative paths, but are unsure whether they would be better, or more effective at reaching their goal;
- d) the nature of the specific goal (and its salience) toward which they are heading,
- e) the consequences for being late.

The above is the root issue we were seeking to explore. The “content” form we chose (in 1979) was stuck in traffic on a road. What is helpful in this scenario is how the above questions are addressed. However, clearly, (and reflecting our “human quest for control” to reduce uncertainty, gain greater information, and thereby give us more control), the vignette in its specific content does not have as much application now because there are cell phones which could be used to call ahead; there are Google Maps and Waze apps. (and eventually there may be self-driving cars!).

However, at its root issue, there will continue to be, more than likely, choices in life involving “being stuck”; uncertainty as to how long one will be stuck; whether it is better to “stay the course” or to seek alternatives, which may or may not be viable, all while keeping in

mind the different goal gradients! And we will still have to choose among different modes for the wiests choices.!

### THE VIGNETTES.

There are two situations: one with a routine business appointment. One with a very important business appointment. There are four possible vignettes in each:

**Routine** business appointment and the freeway is snarled by an accident up ahead. You have access to an exit just off to the right, but you know of no obvious alternative route to your destination from this exit.

1. You see that by remaining of the freeway you will be delayed 15-30 minutes but even with that delay you will not be late for your appointment
2. You see that by remaining of the freeway you will be delayed 15-30 minutes you will be 15—30 minutes late for your appointment
3. You cannot see the accident and have no sense of how long you will be delayed. Each minute you spend on the freeway will make you one minute later for your appointment.

And an additional situation also introduced in some vignettes:: You are in the right hand lane, your exit is 500 yards to the right. The right shoulder is clear for 400 yards but ends in a narrow bridge of about 10 car lengths. The shoulder then reemerges and is clear up to your exit.

### CODING

**APPROPRIATLEY YIELDING;** When faced with a routine appointment and they wouldn't be late, individuals chose to stay on the freeway and saw that as positive yielding. Responses included:

Since there's nothing I can do, try to remain calm, relax and accept it. Listen to music  
Stay in same lane, breathe, noting I can do; stay in my lane, not worth the gamble  
Pray; if the meeting were routine, I'd stay the course; I'd rather be late than get lost  
Watch other people; meditate; enjoy here and now; listen to radio: sports, , music  
Smile.

One response said even for a very important meeting would be no different than any other, I'd stay on freeway, practice my breathing and hope I'm not too late. Question: is this +Y or -Y (resignation)?. Comments: Sybil Carrere and JS: : As Sybil pointed out, attitude is everything. Even with an important meeting, it could be +Y with a good attitude. But I suspect for many people it would be closer to q4 because they wouldn't be able to have a good attitude

Stay on freeway and wait it out; I'll be fine and not be late js; Cute! Maybe this is magical thinking, and maybe it approaches -Y because it may be self-deception to accept the situation; but since it is not clear - maybe they won't be late - I'd leave as + Y

Expect person with whom I have appointment to understand JS: Seems like they're working with their cognitions in a positive way (it's okay, my appointment will make allowances);

Have a beer JS: pretty cute, but pretty irresponsible. Still, it seems to reflect a q2 attitude

That's the breaks JS, Seems a gppd attitude; very different from getting upset with other driver -A; , feel like wasting time, resignation (-Y)

If surface route would make it even more a delay, I'd stay on freeway; ½ late is better than 40 min to hour late. (a cognitive strategy to feel calm about +Y choice)

Gamble and stay on freeway

Stay on freeway, relax (+Y) and allow myself to think about book I'm writing

**APPROPRIATELY ASSERTIVE** If I knew I would be late, I'd :

Get off freeway; explore, check map ; ask for directions; look for a phone to change appointment time, apologize.

If this were an important meeting, I'd try an alternative so I know I'd done everything I could

Stop at pay phone and call them

Would feel more relaxed at least trying to do something about being late.

I would take a chance to find an alternative route, or at least a phone to call ahead. To inform the other parties of the situation. Listen to radio to learn about conditions. Exit immediately

I might be adventurous enough to get off the freeway; just because there is no obvious exit and route, doesn't mean one doesn't exist

I like new routes and might explore another alternative

Depends on if weather was hot and I didn't have air conditioning, I'd get off

**NEGATIVE ASSERTIVE** honk horn and shout obscenities; curse; be upset; stay on freeway and fume; go down shoulder cut back in; go down shoulder if had someone else's car; Try to get there faster JS: Not sure what this means, since there is uncertainty. If it means staying on the road, but tailgating, switching lanes, driving dangerously, then it's -A

In the vignette, you are in right hand lane, your exit is 500 yards to the right. The right shoulder is clear for 400 yards but ends in a narrow bridge of about 10 car lengths. The shoulder then reemerges and is clear up to your exit. You will be 15-30 min late. When a respondent says move to right shoulder and coded it as +A disagree and say it's -A. Since it is not a "straight shot" to the exit, the person must cut in front of other cars. Other than a real emergency, we see this is an overly entitled -Y.

**NEGATIVE YIELDING:** stay on freeway and fret; feel guilty; go home; I easily become disoriented; cry; apathy; Stay on freeway until I start to get really anxious about lateness Turn on the radio and wait resignedly and unhappily for a while; I hate stand still traffic . Why me?!!, why now?!! Stay on freeway try to relax, but this kind of thing makes me nervous (honest!).

**POOR COMBINATIONS -A, -Y**

Get upset with the traffic and other drivers, and that I'm just wasting time waiting (-A -Y)

Wait and steam ((-A -Y) Fight and cuss but stay there (-Y with -A affect

Try the other route (+A) and probably get lost -Y

### **QUESTIONS:**

--Is just staying on freeway or just getting off + or – or neutral? SC and JS: Without some indication of attitude, you really can't tell because each action could be done with a negative or a positive attitude

-- Tough luck (+Y or -Y? JS: JS hard to code, again, what is attitude, It's not exactly Zen acceptance – tough makes it seem like -Y, but luck suggests it's just one of those things. I'd probably code +Y

-- Get mad, but that is good therapy for me to release anger ? JS: +A or -A depending on the nature of getting mad (just upset, or punching walls

**NOTING EMOTIONS:** As noted, part of our coding depends on the attitude; the same behavior, waiting on the freeway can be peaceful (+Y) or in fury (-A). Other **negative assertive emotions** include “ steam, swear; mad angry, upset, impatient; simmer”. **Negative yielding emotions** include: feel guilty, resigned, feel anxious, frustrated , unhappy.

Positive emotions (in +A or +Y) include: feel patient, relax, hand loose, enjoy, calm, acceptance, create fantasy/daydream; Also, note that emotions such as frustration can trigger assertive behavior (e.g., get off, try alternative route).

For a very creative chart that Sybil Carrere made of the different behavioral options, and the affect around them, please see the last page.

### **SUMMARY AND WISE COMBINATIONS**

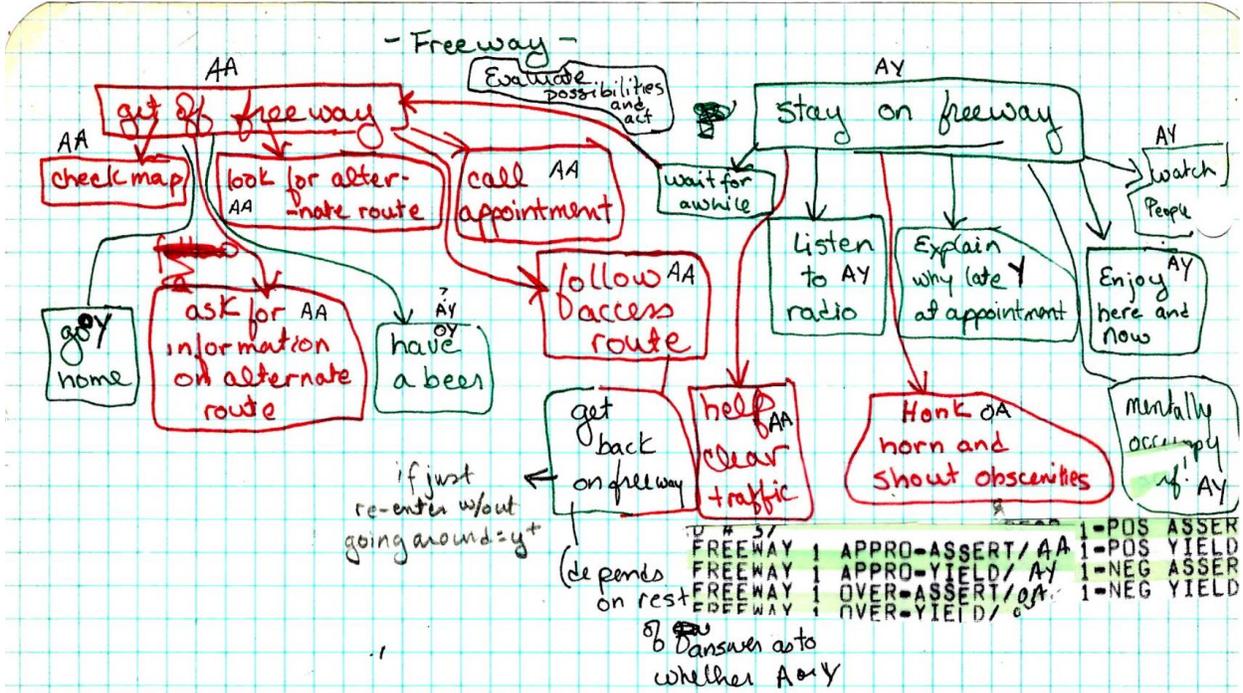
As noted, this particular vignette describes a situation which, at its root, is one we all face in life: being stuck; and having different paths, different choices for responding. Some of the answers here provide interesting ideas for how to handle not only the specifics of these freeway vignettes, but life choices in similar “root issue” circumstances. When faced with uncertainty and confusion, it is helpful to take a breath and center oneself; then to assess the importance of the goal, and the best possible paths /alternatives to the goal: e.g., does one “stay

the course”; does one seek alternatives. In this particular series of vignettes, the goal is “routine” or “important”. The behavioral choices are to do nothing (stay in traffic); try an alternative that may or may not be helpful (stay in motion!); and a third (get in the far right shoulder, then cut back in in front of others (which, except in a true emergency, we label as entitled and insensitive “negative assertive.”

However, for the first two behavioral options (do nothing) or try an alternative route, much depends on attitude. There is uncertainty in both. It is not clear that one is better in terms of getting you there faster. So it’s an opportunity to learn about yourself. Can you wait patiently? Do you fear risking an alternative? Clearly the negative assertive (yelling, screaming, fury), and negative yielding (feel passive, guilty, helpless) are not wise choices. What might be examples of wise responses, (+A, +Y ,and in combination?

In making a choice, (even in the face of uncertainty), some wise responses here include keeping a positive attitude: e.g., : Take the other route, singing; don’t panic no matter what you do! (so positive but not clearly assertive or yielding). Find a way to creatively use the time: e.g., stay on freeway, relax and allow myself to think about book I’m writing (+Y+A). See if there is a lesson that can be learned for next time (without undue self-blame and negative judgment): e.g. should have left earlier, but relax and enjoy the Dodgers winning (+Y, but also a learning element for next time (+A). Get off if can; if not, relax, but learn from this and leave earlier next time (+A;+Y). Try positive assertive, but if thwarted, accept and stay in moment: Get off freeway if possible, if not, relax and listen to music (+A, +Y).

We now turn to the final section, an exploration of different individuals’ responses across different types of vignettes, to see if we can notice some patterns between self-assessment on assertive and yielding (real and ideal) and responses with and across vignettes.



positive effect (G2)

- AY relax
- AY enjoy
- AY calm
- AY AA creatively
- AY acceptance
- AY AA fantasy
- AY hang loose
- AY patience
- AY meditate

negative effect

- OA swear
- OA OY nervous
- OA mad/angry
- OY frustrated
- OA OY upset
- OA impatient
- OY simmer
- OA OY hate
- OY apathy
- OY shut
- OY cry