DO YOU TRUST YOUR GUT INSTINCTS

FRIDAY was one of the most challenging days I have had on tour in a very long time. I had a passenger become mentally unstable. I was debating all day where does compassion end and termination begin? I am not sure if this gentleman forgot to take his meds, or was diabetic and ate too much sugar, or just snapped. The day started with him babbling incoherently about TV Shows like: Beverly Hillbillies and then Bewitched imitating the characters and reciting the credits and then the long rambling lists that made no sense. By lunch time he was telling me he had a gun in his travel bag and was going to use it. I am thinking should I be dropping this customer at the next police station or calling for the cops to meet the bus.

This gentleman dropped his bag several times during the week and I knew there was no gun.

When we stopped at a visitors center he came out ranting that the cranky old bags were eyeing him, making sure he did not take too many brochures with cuss words and obscene hand gestures. Next words were, "I need to get my gun and get the old bags."

A bit later a restaurant manager called to tell me that when this passenger was told that all alcohol had to be consumed on premise, he threw a fit and was cussing the wait staff, giving them the finger, complaining how bad the food was, and started to throw things. The manager told me I had only a few minutes to get him out of the restaurant or he would be physically ejected, and the cops were already on the way.

I brought this traveler to the hotel and suggested he take a nap for a little while hoping that would help this traveler calm down.

At the hotel the manager chased me down and said that this particular guest had been smoking in the room, set off the hotel smoke alarms, and the staff heard him say he had a gun in his travel bag and was going to use it. The hotel manager gave me 15 minutes to get the guest off property or she would have the police remove him. How does a guest go from being a sweet gentle guy, to a nut case so fast? She also suggested she was going to eject the whole group.

This problem was compounded because every time this gentleman got off the bus he would lose his pants and either is backside was hanging out or his junk was out of the trunk. He wore no underwear and refused to use the belt the group purchased for him. I was aware of some possible mental illness but he was quiet and just seemed to be enjoying himself for the first six days. The other travelers had already decided they did not like this person because he kept losing his pants. I saw the situation as someone that needed a friend. He was traveling because he was alone and society had rejected him. He was not embarrassed because he kept losing
his pants. He lost his pants every time he got off the bus and then pulled them back up. As far as I was concerned this was no big deal, it was a quirk that I needed to deal with as a tour director.

In all of the years I have been on the road I have never had any passenger become this verbally abusive in a very short time period. He was yelling that any man that was not married was gay and needed to be shot and the bus was full of queers and fags. There are lots of homophobic people that feel there view point is right, that does not make them evil.

I checked this customer into another hotel, called the family and told them where he was and why he was being terminated from the tour and advised that we were not taking him back on the bus. I spoke with the new hotel and they said they would look after him until family arrived or he started talking about having a gun at which point the police would look after him. He kept saying I poisoned him by making him eat lobster, mussels, and clams but he was the only one in the group that had no lobster, mussels claims and only ate a piece of fried fish the night before. I tried to reason with him and reassure him, which was not possible.

Where does compassion end? The other passengers felt I should have left this fruitcake off at a hospital or police station as soon as he started talking about having a gun in his travel bag. They felt because I was compassionate towards mental illness, I was endangering their safety. One never knows, but I did not sense danger and only felt this person had suddenly become mentally ill and the circuits weren’t connecting.

I solicited information from friends trying to understand what might have happened and how someone could go nuts so fast. Many of you in the medical field told me that someone just does not go nuts. Many suggested I should have dropped this traveler at the first police station. I am glad I trusted my gut instincts and did not follow the advice of those offering advice.

**It turns out this traveler had mixed up his medication that morning and taken too many of the wrong pills. I later learned from his family some of the horrible things that had been done to this person over his lifetime.**

It was an awakening for me to see how quick people became judgmental in an issue of mental illness. I am the first to say I did not even consider this traveler mixed up his meds, I just knew he snapped and became verbally abusive. I am glad I trusted my instincts and felt compassion was the right solution.

**Mental illness and gun violence are too very serious issues we face in today’s world. It is very important that we all not become judgmental when someone becomes ill. It is so important when we know a person is not dangerous and becomes mentally ill that we use compassion and understanding as the first tool. Last Friday I took a lot of Verbal Abuse; I have never had someone demand a refund of gratuity paid, I have never had a hotel demand I remove a passenger from a hotel, I have never had a restaurant manager call the police on a guest. I am glad that I did not give up on this soul. I am glad his family was able to correct his medication. I am glad I trusted my gut instincts and choose compassion over immediate termination.**

Sat afternoon this customer called me asking for my help and was totally unaware of what had taken place the day before. He only knew he was in a hotel by himself and that the rest of the group was not there.

I hope that if I ever become mentally ill that those around me choose compassion rather than lock up. We will certainly incorporate this incident into our tour director training class.

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