The Old Commute

I am not writing this to preach as if I am always perky and resistant to the stress of the repetitive daily commute. I'd like to take a minute to relive the old commute out loud for you.

Published November 7, 2016



Before we moved our office to Berkeley Heights, NJ, we were located in Jersey City. I'd like to take a minute to relive my old commute out loud for you... It is 8:25 am, and yes, that's me in the driver's seat of the beige Ford Focus about to take exit 14 off the NJ Turnpike North. I have the radio tuned to 88.3 FM because the smooth yet upbeat morning jazz always seems fitting as the New York City skyline illuminates in the distance. As I encroach on this perfect panoramic painting, it gleams through my passenger window and widens in my peripheral vision. Finally, as I join the line of cars waiting to enter the road to Jersey City, the view steals my full attention. During this daily process, I can't help but think of all the other cars that pass this same view every day. While many of these commuters must feel lucky to pass this scene 261 days of the year, I'm sure there are a significant number of people who become immune to its beauty. The stress and repetition of daily life can cause a sort of psychological "auto-pilot" mode, during which the beholders robotically weave in and out of other vehicles while

trying to reach the $10 parking lot before all the spaces fill up. I then think of Becky, a girl I sat next to in a class during my junior-year semester in New Zealand. Becky carried a New York City bag, wore New York City shirts, and held a dream to someday be able to experience the New York City life in person. Here I casually pass the all-inclusive horizontal image containing Lady Liberty, the Freedom Tower, and the Empire State Building. All the while, many people around the world, like Becky, can only dream of seeing this same skyline in person. As I travel down Christopher Columbus Drive, my head then spins to its final tangent: who has the luxury of casually passing by the Colosseum or the Eiffel Tower on his or her daily commute? Who curses as they spill coffee on themselves while ancient pyramids stand tall in the horizon? I am not writing this to preach as if I am always perky and resistant to the stress of the repetitive daily commute. I am just as susceptible to turning into an MTZ (Morning Turnpike Zombie) as any of the cars or trucks that surround and join me in the morning dance of "foot on the brake, foot off the brake". However, I have figured out a few ways to get myself in a mindset that, for the most part, defeats the stress of driving and keeps the zone-out mode switched off. I find that shaping my mindset during the ride in has a positive effect on my motivation and performance when I reach the office. I've organized what I've learned into a few bullet points below, two of which are on the employee, while the third point is mostly on the employer.

Pretty much everything I said in the second paragraph

Enjoy the road you take and whichever scenes you drive by on your way to work. If you're commuting to a city or somewhere with the city in view, keep in mind that there are people in the world who would race to take their cameras out if they were witnessing the same image as you. If you work somewhere more remote, enjoy the natural beauty in the mountains, hills, trees, or open fields you pass by. Also, be sure to appreciate that clean-er air that city-slickers don't have the fortunate privilege of inhaling. If you don't drive by anything interesting or worth looking at during your morning excursion, then proceed to the next bullet point.

Put something good on

What you listen to can really have an effect on your perspective. Do you ever find yourself becoming philosophically contemplative as haunting Radiohead-esque music plays in the background? Do you ever begin to feel happier and as you put on live mixes of Dave Matthews Band or the Grateful Dead? It's not a coincidence, music really has that effect. Many times I tend to go for the "nolstagic drive" into work, where I put on music to bring me back in time. Songs are basically Horcruxes that hold memories instead of pieces of Voldemort's soul. Songs are a flux capacitor, the exact missing piece that makes time travel possible. Maybe you're a podcast or audiotape person who loves to be read to just like you're a little kid again (except now you are being placed in the middle of a suspenseful criminal investigation by a random narrator instead of being calmly read stories about cartoon bears by your Dad). Or maybe silence is your thing, and the sound of the automobiles zipping by mixed with puffs of hot air blowing out of your heater helps you clear your head and concentrate on the road.

Whether its music, a podcast, or the sound of silence, what you listen to during your commute can help you get in the zone for the rest of your day. And no, I did not just make a Simon and Garfunkel reference, although they are great.

Look forward to your office perks and people

I realize free coffee isn't the biggest deal in the world. However, to a millennial like me who prior to having this job spent probably $15 or so a week on coffee, the free coffee with many flavors to choose from is pretty great. Sure, the Keurig isn't your Brooklyn barista with a 1920's mustache who carefully brews your perfect cup. However, it does its job, it's there for you all day, and unlike your barista, it encourages you to press its buttons. In addition to the free coffee, I'm lucky enough to enjoy coming to work to spend the day with my co-workers. You may not be as fortunate as I am where you can appreciate everyone you work with, but you know you have those certain people at work you can always count on to make your day better. Don't forget to appreciate them, and keep in mind that they may not love their commutes either. If that's the case, be sure to print out this blog post and read it to them in full and as loud as you can as soon as they first sit down at their desks in the morning.

This information is for educational purposes only, and not to provide specific legal advice. This may not reflect the most recent developments in the law and may not be applicable to a particular situation or jurisdiction.