



Proceed with caution

BY RANDY WATKINS, SR/WA

I started thinking one day (which can be questionable for me) about how acquiring right of way can sometimes feel like you are dealing with a “ROW Rage” situation. Over the years of working with landowners, I’ve noticed where some of them transfer all of their pent-up anger and direct it towards the acquisition agent. They may be upset with their spouse, job or children, and their latent anxiety is focused on us as we try to work towards achieving our project goal. Oh, I understand that nobody is pining for a right of way agent to encumber their land, but I’ve witnessed situations where the landowners went berserk, for lack of a better adjective, to describe their behavior. Though typically, I do expect them to vent or go through some stages before they can deal maturely with the project and whatever property rights we may need.

I would like to share an example, with names changed of course, to make my point that sometimes we are absolutely dealing with “ROW Rage,” and I do believe this moniker is applicable.

I went to meet with Joe over in southern Mississippi, and he was completely livid and unable to speak coherently. Joe was “damned mad,” and frankly, I was gonna waste my time trying to reason with him or attempt to carry on any semblance of a rational conversation. So, I finally got to the heart of the matter — turns out, he had been fuming with his soon-to-be ex-wife, and I was the directed target for his bitter acrimony. Yeah, him losing some of his rights on a partial area of his property was certainly a contributing factor, but the anger and frustration with his personal situation were the real culprits. I did not try to conduct much business since he was too upset to visit with, so I returned another day. Furthermore, I had to visit with him several times in small increments until he realized I was not there to spar with him.



medal, but yes, I would like to see some companies acknowledge our accomplishments for these exceptionally difficult acquisitions and maybe turn loose some “green,” if you know what I mean.

People are the most unpredictable species on this planet. One day, a landowner may behave in a certain way, and the next time you meet with them, they are a completely different person. On the same token, the most docile of people driving their cars can become some really aggressive individuals when you do something that they don't care for, whether intentionally or accidentally.

I remember driving in Orlando, Florida, on the way to attending an IRWA course, and as I was motoring towards a tollbooth, I slowed down because I did not know exactly which lane I should be. Man, oh man, I had this driver in a Jeep Cherokee stand on their car horn as he flipped me off, all the while holding a finger out of his vehicle for almost a quarter of a mile. Did I go into road rage mode and give into my temptation to match his aggravation with an equally aggressive demonstration of my own? No, that would have been uncivilized. It definitely would have been satisfying. But hey, I am a trained negotiator and I don't get upset, *right?*

Some professionals have theorized that road rage is certainly a lack of patience, but it can manifest so quickly because of the seeming anonymity of driving in a vehicle. As far as rights of way are concerned, I fully know that people do not behave the same when it comes to their land as they behave in many public and private social settings. I've always postulated that people will fly off the handle over their land, their spouse and their dog, and that the order of importance can change quickly. Also, I give landowners a benefit of the doubt, at least for a while, that they are just experiencing a little case of ROW Rage, and it should pass with some good ole acquisition agent palaver. However, if their bad behavior persists, and you find yourself caught in the middle of a marital soap opera, it's possible you could be dealing with a full-blown whacko, and you have my sympathy for sure. 🌟

Eventually, I sat between Joe and his estranged wife, and we traded words. They verbally shouted at each other, and I awkwardly sat between them. It would have been entertaining if I would have been watching some other fool have to contend with this hot mess. But honestly, I was half expecting one or both of them to pull out a snub-nosed pistol and start snapping caps because they verbally pelted each other, and even went as far as bringing me into it occasionally. I recall Joe's wife saying, “Randy doesn't want to hear your excuses!” Ha, this is reality TV right in front of me — live and in person.

I heard all about Joe's affair, and it was the proverbial “too much information.” This was sure interesting and maybe a tad bit uncomfortable to be involved with, and I kept thinking about how I would handle things if the situation took a violent turn and which way I was going to escape. Occasionally, they would say my name about how the other one treated me, and I was jolted from my sojourn cloud of thought, wondering if this was really happening.

After they signed and I notarized, I walked away with several thoughts. One, I was thankful that it did not get violent, and certainly, I was thankful that I didn't have to dodge any actual bullets. Two, I was contemplating what other line of work I could pursue that would be as financially rewarding and a whole lot less dangerous or contentious. I don't have to tell you readers about how I feel that some companies do not fully appreciate all that us acquisition agents go through in order to provide them with their needed property rights for projects. Well I ain't trying to seek constant appreciation and recognition, and I certainly don't expect any



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