

## Seeing Red

**By Stuart White**  
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I swore I was not going to do another article on how disappointing airlines' customer services are, but I feel I owe it to all the other passengers who were supposed to board the 5.25pm SA Express flight from Johannesburg to Gaborone last week Friday. Talk about a 3-ring circus!

It was the classic SAA trick. Keep you in the dark and keep promising a departure time (hope is a wonderful motivator), and even go as far as taking you by bus to the aeroplane so that all passengers can see the plane (whetting the appetite) and then turning around and taking you back to the terminal building – the build-up then the let down. The reason given - the plane still wasn't working. A malfunctioning aircraft and no one knew that before we set off from the terminal building, not even the pilot? I won't bore you with the whole story, suffice to say it always seems a tad convenient when there are problems with flights and then miraculously they manage to lump two flights together and fly you around the same time as the later one. Hmmm – a convenient mess that saves the airline a fortune because someone did the math and they worked out they could squeeze all passengers from the two flights on the one aircraft.

Anyway the purpose of telling you this is that it made me so mad! Later in the week another situation presented itself to me that, whilst seeming trivial, had me seeing red and frothing at the mouth like a rabid dog. Then on Wednesday I watched on Sky the news of taxi driver Derrick going on a shooting rampage through the Cumbria area in the UK, randomly killing 12 people and seriously injuring a whole bunch more and thought – this is the ultimate angry man! His killing spree was an outlet for his suppressed anger – he was pushed to the point where he snapped. Like me, something made him mad, in his case quite literally.

Anger is all around us but I don't think we really fully understand this common human trait and often don't address or confront it. I found myself in a place a year or so ago where anger would surface often – and it is quite atypical of me.

I am not an angry person by nature so I was forced to look at my situation and question what it was all about. A mentor of mine used to tell me, 'Whenever you find yourself angry just ask yourself one question, what am I afraid of?' Anger is just fear announced! In the case of Derrick all sorts of theories are being put forward as to what triggered his deadly spree – a dispute over a family will, possible tax evasion charges – all of which can invoke fear. And though his is an extreme example, when I see others demonstrating extreme anger, and even myself, I do find myself looking for the fear. It helps to diffuse the situation with others and makes things easier on myself.

Like animals under threat, when we are fearful we respond with aggression or anger; it's just basic primal instinct and we all have it. Anger and fear are interrelated. In fact, most anger springs out of a deep (often subconscious) sense of fear. When we are angry, it usually demonstrates our fear that something or someone close to us is being threatened. Anger is the natural emotion created in a fight-or-flight situation by the physiology of your mind and body. You sense a threat - your mind generates fear and anger. The fear you generate is part of a flight response from your physiology. Anger is the emotional energy you generate for the fight against that perceived threat. In my case at the airport, it was minor – less fear than unease at having my time wasted and my evening plans disrupted. In Derrick's case it must have been extreme and the only solution his disturbed mind could find was to punish first others and then himself for the forces and factors that brought him to that point.

I know some people that seem perpetually angry. People who are always angry have probably learned early in life that fear is the most powerful motivator. Maybe they learned it from a parent, school teacher or the neighbourhood bullies. And when they grow up they use the same bully tactics to get their own way. It's like a defense mechanism. The angry people are quick to blame situations and other people for their anger when in fact it's the circumstances and what is happening around them that is making them scared.

Some of us work with angry employees everyday, there are some customers that are in a constant state of anger, angry prospects (angry before you even get there), angry regulators or even angry children. Sometimes you can just avoid them. You can choose not to work with angry people. Just move on! There are plenty of non-angry people out there. Or you can acknowledge the anger and understand that until you make the anger go away, all responses are going to be off the charts and completely useless to you. And angry people do need help. They need a counsellor or mentor to help them work through why they are always angry and find more positive ways and means to channel the anger and sort out the issues, to somehow help and turn that angry person into a non-angry one.

There are countless incidents like that of Derrick – school shootings, angry ex-employee rampages, family feuds. Some of them come completely out of the blue and could not have been predicted. Others, in retrospect, acknowledge that the perpetrator was somehow out of kilter with the rest of us – loners, weirdos, obsessive compulsives. Most of us can get angry every once in a while, even over seemingly trivial issues because we are fearful when things don't go our way or exactly according to plan. And fortunately most of us don't go on a killing spree as a response. In those situations we may say we could happily kill someone but we don't really mean it. Sadly Derrick and others like him either don't say it, at least to the right person, and once again this latest gruesome episode is a salutary lesson in keeping our cool and keeping our anger under check. The only thing you need to kill is the attitude. It won't be easy if you have developed a lifetime habit of using anger as a weapon of choice but think of Derrick and the like, think of your blood pressure and take a chill pill, especially if you're flying SAA anytime in the near future.

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