Cruising on the commute [1]

Dear Alice,

I commute into the city every work day and usually take the same trains each day. Some time ago another man made a pass at me which I ignored. He persisted and made several other passes over the course of time. At one point, he looked rather pointedly at my empty ring finger. The next phase of events involved his pointing me out to other men he was with and asking about me. The next phase involved his becoming very agitated whenever he saw me, pacing back and forth. When another man began to accompany him on the platform, I initially thought my worries were over and that he had found somebody. Later, he began making passes again, sometimes with his companion joining him. I'm fairly introverted so the easiest thing for me to do has been to ignore everything. I'm also not homophobic. I know that most of the men that I know would never have tolerated his actions and I feel that he has taken advantage of my tolerance. I think he may also be misinterpreting my reaction!!

Sometimes I feel that I am locked into some mutually destructive game with him. Needless to say, this has all been rather stressful for me and I would like the situation to end. I've tried changing trains, but this is difficult for me because of my schedule. I'm interested in your reaction to the situation and any solutions you propose.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Although attention from someone can often be flattering, suggestive glances and casual niceties can turn into uncomfortable situations particularly when a potential suitor continues to make unwanted advances. Since you are likely to come into contact with this person again, here are a few suggestions for dealing with his unwanted advances.

How about dropping your peering-fellow-passer a note expressing your discomfort with his "attention," and your advanced appreciation of its termination? You sound like a civilized guy, so it's likely that the tone of your note would be appropriately firm, but non-threatening.

Written communication can be a comfortable alternative to the verbal route for some introverts. It is important, however, that you make it clear that you are not interested in interacting with him or his friends. By firmly stating your position, you are demonstrating that his advances are not reciprocated, in a way that silence and occasional glances cannot convey. Speaking of glances, it's also a good idea not to acknowledge or return looks from the person. Simply keeping your attention elsewhere can send a solid and reinforcing
message that the interest is not mutual.

Given your Casanova commuter's persistence, it is possible that your honesty will not derail the current state of affairs. If a gentle rejection doesn't work, you may need to be firmer in your rebuke, or express your disinterest in a direct manner, face-to-face. You mention that he made a pass previously. If you've spoken with him, a quick, polite statement that you are not interested might just settle things. While potentially difficult for an introvert, the long-term benefits certainly outweigh the momentary discomfort.

If all else fails, what about switching train cars or making use of a phony ring to dress up that naked finger? Sure, the cruising commuter and his friends may be hurt that you didn't invite them to the ceremony, but they'll get over it.

While no solution is perfect for all situations, hopefully these have given you some ideas of different courses of action that may work for you. If events take a more serious turn—verbal harassment, physical advances, or stalking—then legal steps to end such abuse may be warranted.

Your experiences remind all of us—from commuters to construction workers—that those we cruise may become seasick no matter how innocent our intentions.

All the best for a peaceful commute.

Alice!

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Published date:
May 17, 1996

Last reviewed on:
Jul 02, 2015

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