

# Seven Habits of Highly Annoying Runners

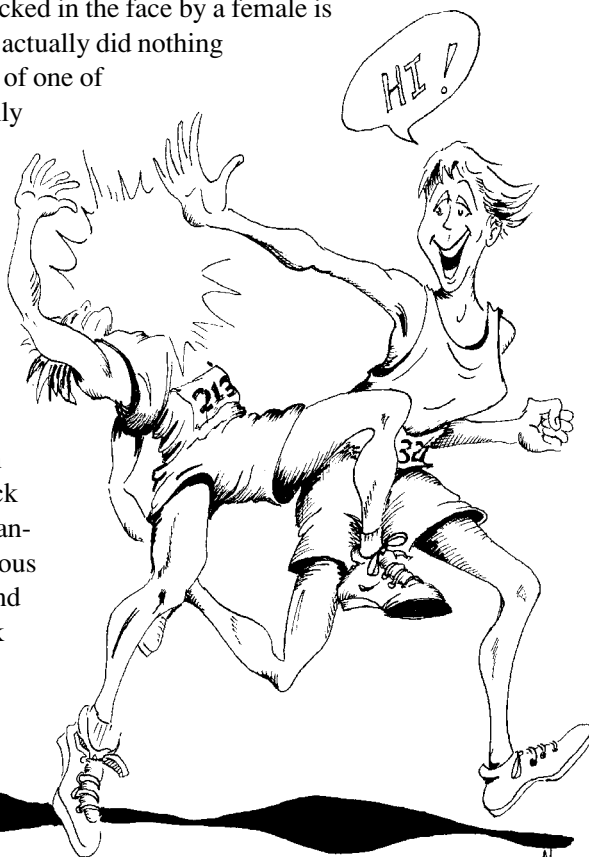
*A Little Common Courtesy Can Make Everybody's Race Better.*

BY LOU D'ALESSANDRIS

**S**mack! It's mile 14 of the Marine Corps Marathon, and I've just taken a left jab from a female runner who abruptly stopped to wave to a friend who called her name. Sadly, being smacked in the face by a female is nothing new, but this time I actually did nothing to deserve it. I was a victim of one of the "Seven Habits of Highly Annoying Runners."

After a standing eight count and being checked out by the fight doctor, Ferdie Pacheco, I got back to the task at hand and finished the race. For once, I was struck by something other than how bad a marathon finish line smells. As I was stuck in this smelly sea of humanity, I reflected on the previous 4 hours and 15 minutes and was amazed at the lack of courtesy and etiquette demonstrated by many spectators and fellow runners.

It occurred to me that some of the problems



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could be due to inexperience. I had run the Breakers Marathon the week before with no problems. Of course, the Breakers was a small event popular with the 50 States Marathon Club crowd, so the average runner had done about 85,000 marathons. The Marine Corps Marathon was full of new runners who probably could use a few pointers in race etiquette and common courtesy. Even veteran runners (which, if you are reading this publication, most likely includes you) could use a refresher. And really, when you think about it, if you are a veteran marathon runner, you obviously lack any shred of common sense, so please read on.

Now, before I get a flood of criticism for being hypocritical, I must admit that I am guilty of many of the following crimes. All I can ask of you is the same thing I ask of myself . . . try your best, attempt to change, and apologize if you make a mistake.

## ANNOYING HABIT #1: LINING UP AHEAD OF YOUR PACE

We all have been there. The gun sounds, and after clearing the start, you are confronted with a group of less-than-elite athletes. Whether they are walkers or slow runners, for some unknown reason they have chosen to line up for the start in the territory reserved for elite runners with last names I cannot pronounce. Make no mistake; these people are not Kenyans—unless their first or last names happen to be “Kenyana,” in which case technically they would be Kenyans, but you get my drift.



Michael Hughes

## ANNOYING HABIT #2: WALKING SIDE-BY-SIDE IN TRAFFIC

I have no problem with racewalkers, runners who need a break, or even people out for a casual walk as part of a marathon; just recognize what is going on around you. Walkers who feel the need to travel four or five wide make the first mile a hazard, much like the people driving 10 miles per hour below the speed limit in the high-speed lane. These people are oblivious of common courtesy and are best described as human cholesterol clogging the running artery. Well, you are all on notice, because I've got some Lipitor in my gel belt and I ain't afraid to break it out!

## ANNOYING HABIT #3: STOPPING ABRUPTLY

Nothing can turn a marathon into a replay of the '60s TV show *Batman* faster than somebody stopping suddenly in the middle of the pack to wave to a friend (*SOCK!*), to adjust clothing (*POW!*), or to pick up a dropped item (*BAM!*). Twice in the past year, I have had collisions in the early miles of a race when the person in front of me decided to stop and turn around to pick up a dropped item. If you have the urge to stop to pick up something that you dropped, here's a little tip: pretend you're in a porno theater; if you drop something, it's just not worth picking it up.



Michael Hughes

## ANNOYING HABIT #4: MOVING SIDEWAYS WITHOUT LOOKING

Do you ever change lanes during rush hour without checking your mirrors? If you live in Massachusetts, ignore that question, but if you live in the other 49 states, then your answer is probably “no.” So why on race day do you make sudden moves without looking to see whether anybody is behind you? Look, signal, and move. I have found that the best thing you can do is put your hand out to where you intend to move. This not only signals your intention, but Mary Decker Slaney coming up from behind will hit your hand, not your feet or body.

## ANNOYING HABIT #5: CROWDING A TURN

I know that for my fellow four-hour marathoners it is imperative to shortcut a turn to save that extra two seconds. Much like a funnel attached to a length of tube and filled with your favorite beverage at a frat party, this type of funneling is also dangerous. Only now you end up crowding fellow runners instead of waking up at the 50-yard line of the practice football field at seven in the morning with a giant penis drawn in marker on your forehead.

## ANNOYING HABIT #6: TALKING ON A CELL PHONE

Perhaps you didn’t notice, but you’re running a freakin’ marathon! Save your phone calls for a time when it is more appropriate, such as when you are driving 90 m.p.h. on the expressway in your 5-ton deathmobile SUV. Of course, the only thing better than somebody talking on a cell phone during a marathon is somebody talking on a two-way walkie-talkie phone, because then you get to enjoy both sides of the conversation. Amazingly, just hearing one side of the inane conversation is annoying, but hearing both sides is heavenly!

## ANNOYING HABIT #7: BEING A RUNNING SNOB

Most of us are guilty of snobbery at one time or another. But why be elitist? Regardless of who you are, somebody has run more marathons, faster marathons, or tougher marathons than you. Some common examples of running snobbery are people telling you: “Oh, you’ve run 10 marathons? Talk to me when you’ve run 30”; “Your fastest marathon is three hours? I’ve run 18 under 2:30”; “You ran Pikes Peak? Big deal. I ran a marathon on Mount Everest where the entire course was above 20,000 feet and you had to carry a Sherpa on your back for the second half of the race. Now that was tough.”

When a runner says, “You’ve run 10 marathons? Talk to me when you’ve run 30,” what they are really saying is “You suck!” To this person I can say only, “Don’t be such a snob; everybody has different accomplishments and goals. And by the way, I’ve run 75 marathons and two ultras—*You* suck!”

Any four-hour marathon runners who look down on the accomplishments of racewalkers should remember that the time difference between them and a racewalker is roughly equal to the time difference between them and an elite runner.

## ANNOYING HABIT #8: NOT TEACHING YOUR SPECTATORS COURTESY OR ETIQUETTE

OK, I know this was supposed to have only seven habits, but I have eight issues to discuss, and I don't think either of us wants to deal with another one of these articles. Besides, if Dr. Covey's goon squad comes after me for trademark infringement, I need to have some sort of legal defense claiming that I'm really bad at math or that I'm just not all that bright, and this article can serve as exhibit A. Back to the annoying habit: if you are having people out cheering you on, please give them a few pointers on what not to do during the race. Here are some examples of annoying spectator behavior.

- 1. Walking across the course.** If you need to cross the course, make sure there is a significant gap. At mile 25, the last thing I want, need, or am able to do is gauge whether the person crossing in front of me is going to

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get out of the way in time. I'm far too busy telling myself that I'm never going to do this again to care about anything or anybody else.

- 2. Smoking.** If I'm sucking air trying to keep my body going, the last thing I need is a lungful of secondhand smoke. Recognize that I am exercising to stay healthy; besides, smelling smoke distracts me from focusing on my plans to gorge on potato chips and ice cream sandwiches for the next week while I "recover."
- 3. Riding next to your friend/spouse on a bike.** Guess what? Somebody trying to ride a bike at six miles per hour is as wobbly as Charlie Sheen after a night in Vegas with Andy Dick. It takes only one wobble for you to crash into me and end my day. Stay on the sidelines or bike ahead on side streets if you really must utter those nuggets of inspiration such as "You're doing great, baby."
- 4. Stepping on the course for a better view.** If you take a step on the course to look for your runner, then the person behind you needs to take two steps on the course to see his runner. The next thing you know, the runners are living the inverse Venturi effect. I'll save you from Googling the meaning and tell you that the Venturi effect is some geeky physics thing that I don't understand, but one example of which is how wind speeds up when squeezed between tall buildings in the downtown of a big city. Getting back to my incredibly clever analogy, while wind speeds up as it gets squeezed, runners tend to slow down to the pace of the slowest runner in front.
- 5. Driving on the course.** This applies to those (usually smaller) races where the course is not closed to traffic. Really, why ride a bike with which you might just slightly injure somebody when you can drive a speeding mass of metal? Now, don't get me wrong, I like the buzz from car fumes as much as the next guy. And I'm sure that the morphine I would be on after you plow into me would probably kick ass, but I would much rather run without the fear of getting hit. Show some consideration to the runners you are not related to and keep your car off the course. The only exception to this rule is any driver who is on the course blasting the '80s pop group the Hooters from the car stereo.

In summary, to all you cell phone-talkin', linin'-up-too-close-to-the-start, corner-crowdin' marathoners, I can tell you only this: please show some courtesy, and everyone will have a more enjoyable race. And to your chain-smokin', course-drivin' friends, take your act someplace else. Unless, of course, you are blasting the Hooters from your car stereo, then please proceed with caution, and don't be surprised if I stop you and ask how many Hooters shows you have seen. "Two? Well, I've been to eight. You suck!"

