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Saved by the Chime

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My primary mode of transportation is a car and like many Americans I had rarely buckled my seatbelt. This all changed when my wife and I purchased a relatively new car with low mileage, heated seats, a premium sound system, and chiming that begins shortly after the engine starts.

One might ask, “How is a chiming a safety feature?” Well, the chiming is contingent on the seatbelt not being buckled. If the seatbelt is worn, the chiming stops. If the seatbelt is not worn, the chiming continues. The chiming not only continues, but increases in frequency as time passes. What starts as just two chimes every 10 seconds advances to two chimes every 2 seconds. Eventually, the chiming becomes almost continuous and definitely very aversive. It is so loud that it makes the radio hard to hear and conversation nearly impossible.

Because I had rarely used a seatbelt, I would hear the chiming every time I drove our car. I could not tolerate the chime, so I started buckling my seatbelt. At first, I only buckled up after the chiming became absolutely unbearable, about 30 sec after starting the engine. As time passed, I began buckling the seatbelt sooner and sooner. Eventually, I was buckling up after the first two chimes. The pain of the chiming was only relieved when I buckled the seatbelt.

The chiming is no longer a problem for me, and the benefits are enumerable. I was now practicing “click it” behavior consistently which meant the police could not practice writing tickets, at least not for seatbelt violations. More importantly, a safe driving environment was created.

We purchased our car seven months ago. Now I always wear my seatbelt and I have noticed new developments. Before I used to wait until the first two chimes to buckle up, now after starting the engine I buckle up immediately. This progression is only natural. The first two chimes had prompted my buckling the seatbelt. But shortly before the chimes began, without fail, the engine had started. The engine starting always came before the chiming. This pairing ultimately led to the transfer of control of buckling up from the chimes to the engine starting. In a sense, the middle man was cut out.

My buckling has also started to occur in cars not equipped with the chime. I even buckle when I am not the driver. As a passenger, the instant that the driver starts the engine, I start buckling my seatbelt. This change in behavior is not monumental, but is important. If I am ever in an accident, I will be wearing my seatbelt. Buckling my seatbelt could potentially save my life. And I have a little, annoying chime to thank for it.