



**LOOK UP! KEEPING THE PERSONAL
CONNECTION IN TOURISM**

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He can't take it anymore!

That was the message of Terry Dale, President and CEO of USTOA (US Tour Operators Association, a trade association representing 'a unified voice to protect the traveling public, as well as to represent the interests of tour operators' - <https://ustoa.com>) as he jumped onto the stage at USTOA's Annual Conference, breaking in half way through a series of presentations by international thought leaders. He had just three minutes to put across what he felt was the most important message for the 800+ business leaders around him to carry into the new year. As leader of an association representing the largest and most influential tour operators in the American market for US and international travel, critical to global tourism growth and development, he knew how he used this time was critical. His message had to be his personal mantra for the industry.

With unexpected, visibly irate stage energy for a leader in front of such a rich audience of business professionals and decision makers representing literally billions in industry activity and opportunity, not to mention tens of thousands of jobs, he shouted out his clear, unforgettable, attention grabbing words: *"Look up!"*

A sobering shock to the system of the audience, his words quickly did exactly what he had intended. They made each and every one of the travel & tourism leaders present stop and think, think hard, about a new phenomenon impacting societies across the globe: DW, Distracted Walking.

Dale went on to put stats to his irritation. In 2015 in the United States alone:

- A six fold increase in emergency room visits has occurred due to DW
- 1 in 10 pedestrian injuries are a result of DW
- 6 Million crashes occur each year involve texting while driving.
- Selfies are killing more people than shark attacks.

And, of course, the growing sense that it is acceptable to allow mobile engagement to cross over into 'live' social situations, raising rudeness to levels never seen before, and no question, never acceptable to generations before us where manners mattered.

What is our tech obsessed, mobile screen absorbed culture doing to our ability to make the human connections central to the beauty and benefits of tourism?

What damage are we doing by not looking up?

Reflecting on his scheduled PSA (public service announcement) within the greater conference programme, as he called it, as shared by Dale:

“It was out of personal and professional frustration that I decided to devote valuable real estate ie. (stage time) to this topic. I’m alarmed by the trend and trajectory I see taking place of people being so totally engrossed in their mobile devices that they are willing to jeopardize not only their own personal safety but are endangering the safety of others, too. Setting aside personal safety issues which are serious enough, I’m concerned for our industry.”

Dale’s concerns go beyond etiquette. They connect directly to the emotion and economics of our industry. He was unedited in reminding the USTOA audience (and those across the globe) that our industry is there to inspire and enable people around the globe to look up and see all that is around them. Most importantly, to look into the eyes and hearts of the people travellers meet, truly connecting, discovering something new in themselves as they venture out to discover the world.

As he explains,:

“If we look two decades from now, will travel be essential or relevant? If our customers continue on this path of mobile absorption, will the desire and appetite for travel wane and diminish? We love talking about experiential travel but the mobile device has the unique and dangerous potential of stripping the ‘experience’ out of travel. Future generations may think they can get their ‘experience’ in the palm of their hand and save money at the same time.”

So, audience laughter aside, especially having heard Dale’s confession of purposely bumping into pedestrians looking down whenever he is walking the streets of his hometown of NYC, what change is he trying to inspire amongst the USTOA member community?

“It’s all about getting (the issue) on the radar screen of our leaders. While initially it’s something you chuckle about, once you digest it, you realize it is a mounting concern. We can start addressing it through our marketing and PR programs, when we position the ‘human connection’ to the world’s great destinations as an asset only travel can provide.

Dale’s message about social values is not without real business value to global travel and tourism leaders.

“The interaction between people will ultimately provide the enduring memories and a strong bond to a destination. Once established, then the customer becomes a customer for life and that’s where the long-term economic value is derived. ‘Looking up’ also means ‘look out’ for long term economic growth that comes from keeping human connection at the heart of our industry, which is what we all strive for!”

With that, USTOA’s CNN TASK-magnified PSA concludes, and we now resume with our regular industry messaging...



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