

Yolanda is a patient individual, but Toshi really gets on her nerves. The two of them work in a printing plant, handling high-speed presses. When Yolanda and Toshi have to collaborate on a job, Toshi is often gruff, as if he'd rather be working with



someone else. Although Toshi is older and more experienced, Yolanda knows she's good at the work.

Two days ago, they were printing a brochure for a very fussy client. When Yolanda tried to discuss the client's likes and dislikes from a previous job, Toshi ignored her and set up the press in his own way. After 500 copies were done, their supervisor rejected the entire run, criticizing them both. Yolanda bit her tongue and said nothing. That night she was so upset she couldn't sleep.

This morning, again forced to work with Toshi, she insisted on reading the specifications out loud before they started. He tapped his fingers impatiently and scowled. Again she stifled her anger.

This afternoon, in a meeting that the supervisor calls once a month to review the work, Toshi pipes up. "It'd be a lot easier," he says, "if those of us who know the job didn't have to work with less experienced people."

This, finally, is too much for Yolanda. She lashes out at Toshi in front of everybody, accusing him of being rude, sloppy, and ignorant. The supervisor stares at her, aghast, and the other employees look at their hands. When Yolanda finishes, the supervisor asks to talk with her privately.

After the meeting, though she believes she was right to be mad, Yolanda feels embarrassed, wondering if she could have handled the situation in a better way.

What's Inside

Here, you will learn to

- ◆ understand the origin of anger
- ◆ identify who is responsible for your anger
- ◆ recognize how you express anger
- ◆ use seven steps to manage anger

The Nature of Anger

Yolanda's final insight was correct: she could have found a better method of handling her problem with Toshi. By blowing up at him in front of everyone else, she probably created a lot of ill feeling, and she didn't help resolve the underlying difficulties.

To understand the implications of Yolanda's predicament, we need to begin by looking at how and why anger arises.

The Origin of Anger

We all get angry at various times, both at work and in our personal lives. But anger isn't our first response, no matter how much we are provoked. In fact, it is what psychologists call a *secondary emotion*. That is, it stems from some other emotion.

If someone insults you, for instance, you'll first feel some psychological pain. Your self-esteem may be wounded. If the put-down occurred in public, you may feel shame. You may also be afraid that others will believe what the insulting person said. These primary emotions then lead you to get angry.

Numerous feelings can arouse anger. Here are just a few of them:

- ◆ Embarrassment
- ◆ Shame
- ◆ Humiliation
- ◆ Guilt
- ◆ Disappointment
- ◆ Frustration
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Jealousy
- ◆ Resentment
- ◆ Grief

To put it simply, anger is a response that helps you cope with being vulnerable. Like aggressiveness (discussed in Workshop 4), it is usually defensive in origin, even though it can put you on the offensive against others.

Terms for Anger

In describing anger, we often use colorful, metaphorical language, including words like these:

- ✓ fit to be tied
- ✓ exploding
- ✓ flying off the handle
- ✓ like a raging bull
- ✓ at the end of one's rope
- ✓ rabid
- ✓ fuming
- ✓ on a rampage
- ✓ boiling
- ✓ foaming at the mouth
- ✓ blowing up
- ✓ out of one's mind

Can you think of other such terms? What do they tell you about the nature of anger?

Consequences of Anger

Anger can have many negative results. You know, of course, the severest consequences— some people become violent when they're angry, resorting to fists, knives, or guns.

For most of us, however, anger takes the form of words, looks, and gestures, or at most a contemptuous shove. These responses don't hurt anyone in a physical sense, but they can nevertheless have bad effects. Think of the times when your anger at a friend or loved one has disrupted your relationship for days, weeks, or longer.

In a work environment, uncontrolled anger is likely to produce consequences like these:

- ◆ The angry person says unwise things or makes exaggerated accusations.
- ◆ Other people get angry as well.
- ◆ Additional grievances are aired, complicating the situation.
- ◆ Relationships are strained or broken.
- ◆ Morale and team spirit are undermined.
- ◆ The underlying conflict—the source of the original problem— becomes even harder to resolve.

In addition, there are often internal consequences for the angry person. Anger is bad for the health! It has been known to cause the following problems, among many others:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| ◆ Increased stress | ◆ High blood pressure |
| ◆ Anxiety | ◆ Heart disease |
| ◆ Headaches | ◆ Stroke |
| ◆ Upset stomach | ◆ Insomnia |
| ◆ Ulcers | |

All in all, anger usually isn't a grand experience.

Did you know?

A study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health showed a link between anger and heart disease.

The researchers followed 1,300 men with an average age of 62 for a period of seven years. The men with the highest levels of anger (as measured by a personality test) were *three times more likely* to develop heart disease than the men with the lowest levels of anger.

ACTIVITY 5.1

NAME _____

Analyzing an Episode of Anger

Think back to a recent time when you became seriously angry. Try to remember the details, and then answer the following questions.

1. What circumstance (for instance, what behavior by another person) started the feelings that led to your anger?

2. What were your initial feelings that prompted the anger? In other words, what feelings came before the anger?

3. What were the consequences of your anger?

For others:

For yourself:

The Responsibility for Anger

Perhaps the biggest step you can take in handling your anger is to realize who is responsible for it. After reading about the nature and origin of anger, can you guess where the responsibility lies?

The answer is simple: *You are responsible for your own anger.*

“Wait a minute!” you may object. “I don’t get angry for no reason. When I’m angry, I have a good excuse for it.”

That’s true. And it’s true of most other people as well. Often anger is “justified” in the sense that we have legitimate reasons for it. That doesn’t change the fact that the angry person is the one responsible for the emotion.



Think of it this way: Often you may say something like “Nina made me really angry today.” Yet it wasn’t Nina who actually *made* the anger. You made it yourself, most likely to defend yourself from something Nina said or did. However offensive Nina may have been, nobody ordered you to get angry at her.

If you’re angry, the anger exists inside you. It’s yours, nobody else’s. Therefore you are the only one who can manage it properly.

What’s the Use of Anger?



On some occasions when you’re mad, a friend or colleague may say to you, “What’s the use of getting upset?” Often, as this question implies, anger is counterproductive. But it’s important to realize that anger also has its uses. As a defensive response, it can help us adapt to a situation in a number of ways.

For instance:

- ✓ Anger charges us with energy and helps us act forcefully.
- ✓ It focuses our attention.
- ✓ It can lead us to bring negative feelings into the open.
- ✓ If we express anger, it signals others that we mean business.

ACTIVITY 5.2

NAME _____

Accepting Responsibility

Go back to the episode of anger you described in Activity 5.1. Think about how your feelings and the outcome might have changed if you had clearly decided, as soon as your anger flared up, that it was your responsibility. Explain the potential differences in the space below.

To Let It Out or Keep It In

When you think about managing anger, it may seem there are two basic alternatives: let it out or keep it in. In other words, you can either express your anger or suppress it. Unfortunately, as you've seen earlier in this workshop, both of these options can have negative consequences if carried to an extreme.

On one hand, if you let your anger burst out, you may provoke other people to get angry, strain your relationships with them, and undercut any chance of working with them as a team. Such an outburst may not even relieve your anger. It can help you

temporarily blow off steam, but the anger itself can remain and even deepen as a result of the hostile words you've used.

On the other hand, if you stifle your anger, it can make you increasingly frustrated and irritable, ruin your sleep or your digestion, and cause you to feel bitter about everything around you. And if you try to suppress your anger totally, it may burst out anyway—hotter than ever—at the worst possible time, and maybe directed at the wrong person.

If you have a strong tendency toward one extreme or the other—letting your anger burst out or choking it down—you need to modify that habit in order to handle your anger effectively.

ACTIVITY 5.3

NAME _____

How Do I Express Anger?

Answer the following questions as accurately as you can.

1. In a typical situation that makes you mad, how openly do you express your anger? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 meaning that you keep the anger completely hidden, 10 meaning that you express it directly and hotly. Mark the appropriate number below.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Think of a time when you expressed anger in a way that matches the rating you just gave yourself. Describe exactly what you did or said (or what you didn't do or say):

3. How effective was this expression of anger? Mark the appropriate responses.

Effective in relieving your feelings:

- Very effective
 Somewhat effective
 Not effective at all

Effective in moving the conflict toward resolution:

- Very effective
 Somewhat effective
 Not effective at all

4. Do you think you need to change the way you express your anger? If so, how?

Seven Steps for Managing Anger

Luckily, “letting it out” and “keeping it in” are not the only alternatives for dealing with anger. There is a more sophisticated way: you can manage your anger. That is, you can express it in a controlled, measured way—a way that maximizes your chances of improving the situation rather than worsening it.

How can you do this? It’s not easy or automatic, but here are seven practical steps that can help:

Step 1: *Accept the fact that you’re angry.*

Acknowledge your responsibility for dealing with the emotion. Resist the urge to blame someone else for your anger. If, for example, a coworker describes a procedure you should use to address a work problem and you are reprimanded by your boss for handling the situation incorrectly, one reaction might be to become angry at your coworker. However, the responsibility for double checking the solution with your boss was yours, so the anger should be directed at yourself.

Step 2: *Decide exactly what you’re mad about.*

- ◆ Analyze the source of your feelings, and separate the real problem from minor, insignificant matters.

- ◆ If there are some deep emotions underlying the surface problem, try to identify them. For instance, if your boss walks through the office and says “Hi” to your coworker but doesn’t speak to you, and you get mad about that, why are you mad? Just because of the boss’s rudeness? Because you think the boss doesn’t recognize your contributions? Or because you think your coworker is trying to undermine you somehow?

- Step 3:** *Be sure you understand the facts of the situation.* For example, if you’re angry because you heard from Jacob that Sara made a sarcastic comment about you, make certain that Sara actually said such a thing, and then try to figure out the context in which she said it. Could it have been an innocent remark?



Anger Management

Did you know?

Because anger is a stress-inducer, many techniques that reduce stress can also help you manage anger. For example:

- ◆ Take some deep breaths.
- ◆ Visualize a relaxing experience.
- ◆ Exercise till you’re tired and ready to relax.
- ◆ Take a warm bath or a long shower.
- ◆ Listen to soothing music.

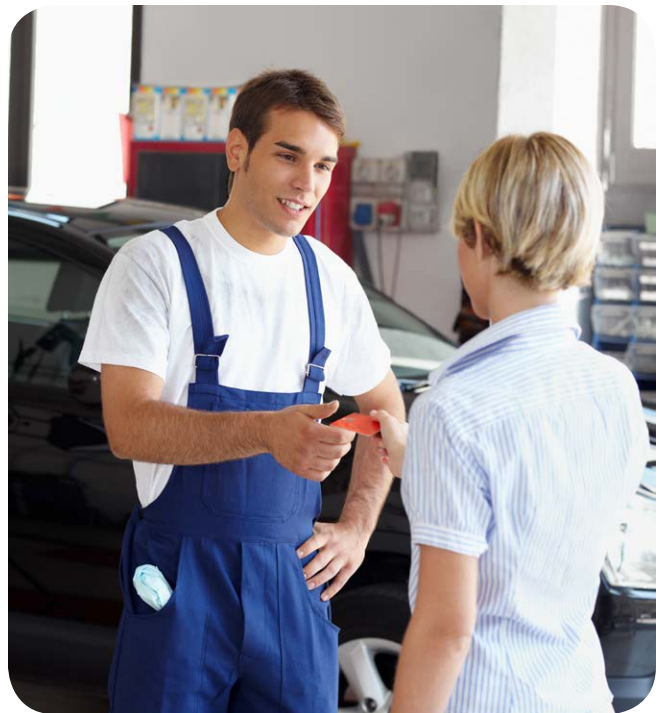
Step 4: *Decide whom you can speak to about the problem.*

- ◆ Usually the best person to address is the one at whom you're angry.
- ◆ In some cases, however, another person might be appropriate: your supervisor, perhaps, or a neutral party whom you trust to give you good advice.

Step 5: *When you speak up, do it in an assertive, not aggressive, manner, as described in Workshop 4.*

- ◆ Describe the problem objectively.
- ◆ Also describe your feelings, your needs, and your desires.
- ◆ Focus on the goal you want to achieve.
- ◆ Avoid self-pity, whining, or complaining that will undermine your point.

Step 6: *Propose a solution that would be acceptable to you and also potentially acceptable to the other person.* “Roger, I don’t expect an apology for your blaming a mistake on me. But now that you understand my feelings, I hope you’ll refrain from doing that in the future. I will do my best to treat you in the same professional manner.”



Step 7: *Afterward, reflect on the entire experience and learn from it.*

- ◆ Think about whether you managed your anger in the best possible way.
- ◆ Decide whether you should modify your approach in the future.
- ◆ Consider multiple approaches to handling your anger issues in the future.
- ◆ Practice the behaviors you will use when you become angry.

“
Holding onto anger is like
grasping a hot coal with the intent
of throwing it at someone else.
You are the one who gets burned.

— **GAUTAMA BUDDHA**
Primary figure in Buddhism

ACTIVITY 5.4

NAME _____

Applying the Seven Steps

Think of another situation in which you have been severely angry. Describe how you could have handled it better, using each of the seven steps.

The situation was:

Here's what I could have done and said:

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

Step 5

Step 6

Step 7



GETTING CONNECTED

The World Wide Web offers an enormous number of resources that can help you learn to handle your anger. Just enter the phrase anger management in a search engine and you'll find numerous sites.

For example, the MayoClinic article *Anger Management: 10 Tips to Tame Your Temper* is available at:

<https://myqss.link/Anger-Management>

Life Supports offers helpful information in the article *10 Types of Anger: What's Your Anger Style?* at:

<https://myqss.link/Anger-Style>

Scroll down for the article.

WORKSHOP WRAP-UP

- Anger usually arises as a defensive response when we feel vulnerable.
- Without proper management, anger can have severe consequences for relationships, morale, and personal health.
- The responsibility for anger lies with the person who feels the anger, not with anyone else.
- The extremes of letting anger out and keeping it in can both be harmful. A better way is to try consciously to manage your anger.
- Practical steps for managing anger include accepting responsibility, clarifying the emotional and factual details, speaking about the matter assertively, and reflecting on the experience afterward.