



Control those Angry Outbursts

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Hello

In this newsletter I am going to talk about anger, largely because of the focus in the media of the Oscar Pistorius trial. Now the trial was about murder, however behind everything was a lot of, seemingly out-of-control, anger.

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems - problems at work, in your personal relationships, and in the overall quality of your life. And as we have seen it could ruin your life. There are people sitting in jail because they could not manage their anger. In this newsletter I am going to address three topics. 1) What is anger? 2) Managing anger. 3) Mastering anger.

What is anger?

Anger is an emotion in response to a perceived threat. It is an emotion which means that you feel it and it manifests in physiological changes. Your body will experience anger. When you get angry your heart rate and blood pressure go up. So do the levels of the hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline. Because anger results in physiological changes, it also means that every time you get angry something happens in your body. If you get angry a lot, or have no idea how to deal with anger, those physiological changes add up over time and are not good for your health.

Anger occurs in response to a perceived threat. It doesn't have to be a real threat. As humans our whole world is perception anyway. We don't respond to what is real, we respond to what we perceive. So the threat can be real, such as someone attempting to steal your phone, or something your mind has made up, such as imagining that someone is out to get you (when they are not).

Then there is the threat component. People get angry when they feel under threat. That could be when your life is threatened, when your rights are threatened, when you feel demeaned or dismissed, or you perceive you won't get what you want.

Anger is a perfectly legitimate emotion. If you are under threat, or someone is violating your rights, it is normal and healthy to get angry. Problems arise when you don't manage your anger well. On the other hand, if you are getting angry because you want everything your way, or you perceive harmful intentions when there are none, then your anger is not appropriate or healthy. That is entitlement or paranoia - and will result in anger that gets you into trouble often.

Managing Anger

Managing anger is about dealing with your response to feeling angry. Everyone manages their anger - whether in a healthy or unhealthy way. The three main approaches we use are expressing, suppressing, and calming. Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive-not aggressive-manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them

met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.

Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. This happens when you hold in your anger, or you stop thinking about it, or you ignore your anger and focus on something positive. The danger in this type of response is that anger not expressed turns inward. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension or depression.

Unexpressed anger can create other problems. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behaviour (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on) or a personality that seems perpetually cynical and hostile. People who are constantly putting others down, criticizing everything, and making cynical comments haven't learned how to constructively express their anger.

Finally, you can calm down inside. This means not just controlling your outward behaviour, but also controlling your internal responses, taking steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself down, and let the feelings subside.

Some simple steps you can try:

- Breathe deeply, from your diaphragm; breathing from your chest won't relax you. Picture your breath coming up from your "gut."
- Slowly repeat a calm word or phrase such as "relax," "take it easy." Repeat it to yourself while breathing deeply.
- Use imagery; visualize a relaxing experience, from either your memory or your imagination.
- Non-strenuous, slow yoga-like exercises can relax your muscles and make you feel much calmer.
- Cognitive restructuring which means changing the way you think. Instead of telling yourself that your world is falling apart, tell yourself that it is not so bad and can be dealt with.
- Because anger often results from problems, improving your problem solving skills can help manage anger.
- Flexibility in thinking, the ability to see alternatives, helps people deal with anger.
- Better communication skills also helps with anger management because angry people tend to jump to and act on conclusions which can be inaccurate. They don't check that what they are hearing has been correctly understood.
- Manage your stress. When you are highly stressed it is easier to become very angry.



The best approach to anger management is to practice calming techniques and then express your needs and views assertively taking into account the other party may not have meant to upset you.

Mastering Anger

Mastering anger means getting to the root cause of your anger and dealing with the root causes. It means dealing with all accumulated pent up anger. It means understanding what triggers anger, why anger is triggered, how and why you respond the way you do, and how to respond appropriately in the future. Because it means dealing with all our stored anger it means dealing with our pain. Underneath anger is a hurting, frightened person. From the time we are born we experience situations that make us angry. Depending on the environment we grew up in we have been allowed to express or suppress anger in various ways. We have also learned to deal with our anger based on how others around us dealt with their anger. If you have suppressed and swallowed anger from various times in your life, that anger is still there and needs to be dealt with in an appropriate way. If you do not deal with suppressed anger, then all you need is an event, and it may not even be a big event, in your life to trigger that "hidden away" anger, and it all comes spewing out.

Pent up anger needs to be released in a safe place where you cannot harm people or property. Unless you know what you are doing it is best done with a professional. A variety of methods are recommended including: Beating the pillows, writing in a journal, hitting a punch bag, intense exercise, locking yourself in a room and screaming. If you are someone who has experienced events at any time in your life that were threatening or violated your rights, you are going to have pent up anger, and you will need to find safe ways to express your anger if you haven't already done so. As you express your anger you will find not only will you feel less angry and resentful, but you will also start to feel more alive and have more energy. Keeping a lid on smouldering emotions is like trying to keep a beach ball under the water. It takes a lot of energy and effort - energy and effort that could be better spent doing things you want to do.

If you are someone who struggles with anger, then work on it and get professional help before you go and do something that harms you or others. It will be a challenging process, but you and the outcomes are worth it. You owe it to yourself in order that you can live the great life you deserve.