

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING YOUR ANGER

Article by: Cheryl Sol

Introduction

Allan has excellent qualifications, a great job and a salary that most people envy. However he hates going to work every day. The reason? He is in a senior management position and does not have the cooperation of his colleagues or his subordinates.

If you speak to any one of them they will tell you that it is the way he deals with them that they cannot tolerate. In particular it is the way that he deals with his frustration and irritation. He is fast thinking and efficient and feels that his staff do not carry out his instructions the way he would want them to and complains that they are too slow.

He over reacts, speaks badly to them and occasionally swears when frustrated. Sarcasm is a powerful tool for him, but leaves others feeling belittled and disliking and resenting him. He has a high staff turnover and those that are there would prefer to be working somewhere else. What Allan has not realized is that in order to manage, you have to be a good leader, and to get respect from your colleagues you need to treat them with respect. Without this there will be no results and one's frustrations increase.

When he gets home, David finds fault with his wife and children. A perfectionist to the last, he nit picks about everything, finding little evidence of anything anyone has done right. He blows up easily and frequently reduces the family to tears.

Gill does not know how to say no to anyone. She takes on most things and often feels taken for granted. She will not let others do what she can do for herself. Her motto is "and anyway its easier if you do it yourself – then you know its done properly". When things get too much for her she gets headaches, overeats and finds herself feeling tearful and moody.

Jane is an excellent mother. She ensures that her children have the best of everything and supports them in all they do. She spends most of her time endeavoring to see that they are able to develop their talents and potential. However when this gets too much for her she finds herself losing it and lashing out at everyone, often smashing things and physically hurting people.

Brian is in a long term relationship in which he leaves most of the decision making to his partner. He believes that she prefers this, which, in fact she does.

If one asks him why he does this, he will say that there is no point in arguing with her as she is very determined. It is easier just to go along with things. However, despite his willingness to please, Brian's partner is frequently frustrated and angry with him. He forgets to do things he has promised to do for her, is frequently unreliable around arrangements and time keeping. (see article - Are you Passive Aggressive?)

These scenarios are all different yet they have something in common. Can you spot it?

None of them have found ways to deal with their irritation and anger constructively.

What is Anger?

Anger is a normal human emotion.

It is one of the things that exist for evolutionary purposes i.e. to protect us.

When we experience anger It is a signal that we, or something that is a part of us e.g. our family, possessions, country etc are under threat and the sensation of irritation or anger arises to alert us to take some kind of action.

It is irrational thinking to believe that “we should never get angry” because it is in our hard wiring to do so under certain circumstances.

However where things *go wrong* is when we:-

- misperceive the threat or
- over react or mismanage our anger response.

It doesn't matter how intelligent you are, you are unlikely go far if you do not deal with your anger intelligently. This is part of the concept of Emotional Intelligence which has become popular and written about by certain authors e.g. Daniel Goleman

Personality Characteristics which Predispose you to Anger

Edmund Bourne in *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (2010) writes about the characteristics that perpetuate stress within us. These also make us more predisposed to being easily angered.

These are:-

- perfectionism
- excessive need for approval
- tendency to ignore signs that you are experiencing stress
- excessive need for control.

We can see examples of each of these in the examples above.

The trick then is to express anger in the right way at the right time to the right person.

This is not always easy.

Some ideas.

1. It is sometimes better to wait until you have calmed down before dealing with the issue
2. Don't always assume you are right
3. Don't be afraid to apologize if you are wrong.
5. It is not useful to repress anger but rather to learn to express it correctly when it is minor irritation ie “young anger”.
6. Don't attack people or they will attack back.
7. Deal with one issue at a time or you will get swamped
8. Allow others to disagree with you. It's okay to have different opinions.
9. Ask yourself “Is this constructive – what I am saying, how I am saying it, why I am saying it and the timing of it.”
10. Allow others to respond.
11. Don't get personal, swear or get violent.
12. Your goal should be to clear the air i.e. to gain understanding or give voice to a complaint rather than to annihilate the person or score points.
13. Learn to separate what is really important from the things you can let go of i.e. it causes a lot of frustration and anger when you expect perfectionism from yourself and others.
14. Learn stress reduction techniques like relaxation, visualization, meditation to reduce your level of tension and increase your threshold for tolerating irritation.
15. Learn to observe yourself as well as participate. Recognize when you are going to act inappropriately and stop yourself.
16. If you have a tendency to become violent, verbally or emotionally abusive when angry seek professional help.