

LEADERSHIP TIPS

ANGER MANAGEMENT Spring 2003

by Dr. Marilyn Manning

Jason is a division manager at a large manufacturing plant. He has a reputation for being very loyal to the company, hard working, bright, and dedicated to building customer loyalty. Due to his stellar performance record, none of his supervisors have ever mentioned his "flaw." He is unable to express his anger, frustration, and impatience with his staff in appropriate ways. A simple request can be met with: "You figure it out. I have eight other things to tend to." Or, "Why do you care if I handled your customer myself.... I took care of it. That's all that matters." Or, "I already showed you that procedure. Weren't you listening?"

Michael is a top executive in a high tech company. He is an extraordinary achiever. He has landed many contracts, headed up innumerable successful projects, and has been a key contributor overall. His whole identity is with the job. His normal workday starts at 8am and ends between 9 or 10pm. On Saturdays and Sundays he puts in 4-5 hours to "catch up." His behavior is generally positive, albeit bossy, during the day. But, if someone catches him at work after 6pm, he is known to snap at them, be sarcastic, and on occasion, even yell. He doesn't handle his anger or frustration appropriately.

Mina is a super star in her sales department. She was recruited from a competitor for her years of experience and her superior expertise. Her new boss didn't realize when hiring her that she is very self-centered, arrogant, and suffers from an inflated ego. In meetings, she puts down others' ideas as "stupid," she finds questions inconvenient, and she continually criticizes the company. Her condescending attitude has become a major issue for her supervisor.

Through the ages, we have tried to understand, control and appropriately express our anger and frustrations. Anger is a very powerful emotion that can be misused when not controlled, but can also be useful when strategically aimed to make a point. What follows are some guidelines on how we can use anger properly and how we can coach others to do the same.

Anger feels justified.

Anger or frustration is a natural response to certain stimuli. When we feel wronged, when our feelings are hurt, when we are disappointed, when we witness someone else being mistreated, when we are not being listened to, or when we keep experiencing a repeated mistake or breakdown, we can get angry or frustrated.

Each of us learned different ways to express our anger. Some totally suppress it, others show it in facial expressions, some sigh, others raise their voice or make a fist, some stomp their feet, some cry, and others complain incessantly. Most of us let anger control our reactions. In a few easy steps, and with some disciplined practice, you can learn to control anger.

Take a moment to cool off before doing anything.

It's key to notice immediately when you are starting to feel frustrated, impatient or angry. At the first inkling of impatience, take a few deep breaths and focus on something else.

Change the pattern.

Do whatever you can to change the situation. Get out of the line of fire. Leave the area for a few minutes, if possible. Change the subject. Move physically. Take a short time out.

Listen vs. talk.

We experience less stress when we listen. Start asking questions and just listen. Don't argue, justify or rationalize. Listen attentively. When people feel really listened to, they feel validated.



Ask, "Is it worth it?"

Pick your battles. Is the situation really worth investing your energy? Some are, some aren't. Is it worth losing control over, looking foolish, being inappropriate?

Are you in charge, or are you giving up your power?

If you are letting someone else make you angry, you are giving them the power. Assert your own power and take control. If you can't calm down and speak without emotion, take a few moments to write down your thoughts. Read aloud what is appropriate for the situation.

Admit that anger is an issue and take charge by keeping an "anger" journal.

Write down, each day, incidents that trigger your frustration or impatience. Keep the journal for 2-3 weeks. You will become acutely aware of what triggers your reactions. This gives you the power to choose new more constructive reactions.

When I was hired to coach Jason, I asked him to follow these steps. After he kept an anger journal for 2 weeks, he could see that the stimuli that triggered his impatience was when his staff "interrupted" him about things that could really wait. He not only learned to curb his impatience, but he scheduled regular one-on-one time with his reports. He asked that they save their questions for the meetings. He also made himself available for staff from 4-5PM. Staff learned to be more sensitive to his needs as

Dr. Marilyn Manning CSP, CMC

945 Mountain View Avenue
Mountain View, CA 94040-2411

FIRST CLASS
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MTN. VIEW, CA
PERMIT NO. 461

Dr. Marilyn Manning, CSP, CMC • (650) 965-3663 • fax (650) 965-3668

he showed a willingness to be more available to help them.

The president of Michael's company asked me to work with Michael on his "moods." Michael admitted that his life was totally out of balance. He said he loved work, but was feeling the strain and not really having fun. Besides keeping a log of his "frustrations," we also examined his weekly schedule. He was able to cut back on some hours, hire a needed assistant, and commit to taking some of his vacation days. Within 6 months, he got his life back into some balance. He is still a workaholic, but he is better at setting some limits. He is no longer expressing his anger inappropriately at work.

In coaching Mina, she concluded that she does not have the patience to manage staff. We were able to put her into a position as an individual contributor, minimizing her time with others. We gave her examples of how negatively her behavior and attitude were impacting staff, and she improved temporarily. However, when not closely supervised, Mina would lash out again. The company's insistence on her improving seemed to be the motivator for her to take a different position. The fresh start was better for all involved.

Remember, when you coach your staff,

some are always more receptive than others. **To control anger, the person must have the desire to change.**

Master these steps yourself, and then coach your staff to do the same.
We can only teach what we can model.

The best leaders are those who can handle stress and crisis well. How we do under pressure is how our success is ultimately judged.

How to recognize when anger is a problem:

1. Is the person overreacting and justifying their anger or frustration?
2. Are they easily irritated, frustrated or anxious?

3. Are they generally tense and find it hard to relax?
4. Are they overly critical and judgmental of themselves or others?
5. Do they display negative body language - rolling their eyes, making a fist, sighing.
6. Do they act impatient when kept waiting or interrupted?
7. Do they find it hard to trust others?
8. Are they raising their voice more frequently?
9. Are they working excessive hours and not taking breaks or time off?
10. Are they getting especially picky about details, seeing small errors in most things?

If the answer is "yes" to 3 or more, it's time to seek some help. Anger Management Coaching and Workshops may greatly benefit your organization.

YES, send me a FREE article and information on ...

- Strategic Planning
- Team Building
- Anger Management Workshops and Coaching
- Leading Change

Name: _____

Email address: _____

FAX this page back to (650) 965-3668