



Exercise: Expressing Anger Constructively

Experiencing the range of positive and negative emotions is simply a part of the human experience. It is not reasonable to ask anyone, including yourself, not to have certain emotional reactions. They are simply inevitable. This means that you will at times, no matter how much you would prefer not to, experience anger in the workplace. It is natural to experience anger, and it is also natural to seek to express your anger. To ignore anger is to ignore its basic function of sending you a message about a difficult situation. Anger usually arises as a reaction to frustrating circumstances, and expressing the anger may be the best way to minimize circumstances such as these in the future.

It is important to consider how you can express your anger constructively. Here are five steps toward this goal:

- 1] Before saying or doing anything, take a moment to contemplate whether you are **justifiably** angry, or whether your angry reaction resulted from an impulse due to a misperception or an unrelated personal trigger.
- 2] Remain **respectful** at all times. (Do not make judgments or accusations. Avoid raising your voice, name-calling or swearing.)
- 3] Ensure that the anger stays **proportionate** to the situation (don't overreact).
- 4] **Avoid personalizing** the situation (e.g., say "the fact that your project is late is causing real difficulties for the team" rather than "I'm so tired of you not caring about deadlines").
- 5] Remember that the goal of expressing anger **constructively** is to address its cause and work toward problem-solving the cause, not to punish those involved in causing it.

This may seem like a lot to remember, especially when you are in the midst of an angry reaction. Take a few moments now to contemplate the core ideas:

JUSTIFIABLE, RESPECTFUL, PROPORTIONATE, DEPERSONALIZED, CONSTRUCTIVE.

If even one or two of these come to mind in a situation in which you must express your anger, you will be taking strides toward doing it effectively. And, simply pausing to think of your technique may provide all the time you need to calm down enough to make certain you are expressing anger constructively.