



Managing My Anger

A PSYCHIATRIST'S PERSPECTIVE

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What is **anger**?

It is a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence triggered by the perception that I have been inconvenienced, offended or wronged.

What are some of the **characteristics of all feelings including anger**?

Feelings change.

Feelings are tightly integrated with what we believe and do.

Feelings strongly incline us to believe and behave in certain ways even when those beliefs are irrational and those behaviors are not in our best interest.

Feelings are generated by our brains, not by our circumstances or others behaviors.

We often confuse our feelings with facts.

We are inclined to make two mistakes about our feelings; we may take our feelings too seriously, or not seriously enough.

Do other people **often become angry** at work and in their personal lives?

It is obvious that anger is a common reaction to the ordinary aggravations of life.

Do **I sometimes become angry** at work and in my personal life?

Yes. And I have noticed that I am more prone to anger than some people and less than others.

What are the **two basic positions on anger**?

1 Anger adds no value to my ordinary daily life and I will strive to minimize its occurrence, expression and impact.

2 Anger is normal, unavoidable, justified when things don't go my way and, while unpleasant, I value it as a part of who I am; I am not willing to give it up.

What **value** (and aggravation) **does anger bring** to my life?

It is not pleasant.
It does not enrich my life.
It does not give me joy.
It does not give me a sense of purpose or meaning.
It does not help me make better decisions.
It does not make me more productive.
It does not improve my relationships with others.

It does not make me a better person.
It does cause me stress.
It does cause me to feel embarrassed afterwards.
It does promote resentment, rumination and grudges.
It damages my relationships with others.
It would appear that anger adds no value to my life; instead, it diminishes my life.

Do I have a **problem with anger**?

If I get angry, I have a problem.
If I get angry a lot, I have a big problem.

Why do I **get angry**?

My brain is constructed and programmed to produce feelings of anger when I feel threatened or thwarted.
Feelings of anger are triggered by my **amygdalae** and their associated neural networks in my limbic system, but I can use my **prefrontal cortex** to decrease the neurological activity in that system.
I have observed others becoming angry my entire life, and I've come to accept anger as a normal, expected part of life.
Angry people often get their way.
Many of my role models have thrown temper tantrums.
If I have indulged my anger instead of restraining it, I will predictably become angrier over time, and become angry more often and in response to increasingly trivial aggravations.
My anger is just a part of my personality.
So, I become angry because I can, because I choose to and because I have never seriously considered another option.

Who is to blame when I become angry?

I usually mistakenly blame others or circumstances.
The truth is, only my brain can make me angry.

Can I **control my anger**?

Of course I can.
I already do.

I only throw major temper fits in situations where I think I can get away with it.

Can people **reason with me** when I am angry, and **can I reason with others** when they are angry?

No and no. It is best to put these kinds of questions to myself and others after I have calmed myself or my colleagues have calmed themselves.

Does my **environment influence** the intensity and expression of my anger?

Of course it does.

If I am in an environment where people routinely yell insults and scream obscenities such as sporting events, I am much more likely to behave that way too.

If the same irritations occur in church, I am much less likely to give free rein to my anger and behave boorishly.

I am also much less likely to choose to have a temper tantrum when the boss is present.

Is anger **easy to control**?

It depends.

If I have diligently practiced controlling my anger over the years, it's pretty easy to do.

If I have felt it is my God-given right to be angry whenever idiots annoy me and I have exercised my right frequently, it will take a lot of effort to raise my low emotional intelligence score.

Can I decide to just **stop feeling angry**?

No. I feel what I feel.

Changing my feelings directly is not a good way to start.

But I can change what I believe and do, and what I believe and do have a great deal to do with what I feel.

I can best manage my anger indirectly by changing what I believe and what I do.

How do **SOMC leaders view anger**?

Becoming angry is a leadership flaw.

Expressing anger is a leadership failure.

Is it ever **appropriate to be angry** in the workplace?

No.

If I become angry, it is a leadership flaw.

Everyone, including me, is a flawed leader.

Is it ever **appropriate to express anger** in the workplace?

Not unless my life is being threatened.

If I express my anger, it is a leadership failure.

When I occasionally fail in this way, I must apologize and learn from my failure.

If I fail often, I will not succeed as a leader at SOMC.

Can I **reprogram my brain** to generate less anger?

Yes, I can.

The question is whether I will.

How can I reprogram my brain to generate less anger?

First, I must decide I have a problem.

Second, I must decide I'm going to solve it.

Third, I must decide to pay the price in time, effort, patience and persistence.

Fourth, I must figure out what to do. (Any friend or coach who has minimized their anger problem can help me with this step.)

Fifth, I must do it and keep doing it for the rest of my life.

What is the best antidote for anger?

Curiosity.

If I focus on why I am reacting in anger instead of mindlessly reacting, I can transform my anger into a learning opportunity.

When I realize I have become angry, what should I do next?

Be quiet.

Resist the temptation to vent. (Contrary to conventional wisdom, venting does not help.)

Take responsibility for my feelings.

Take a break and think.

Focus on healthy distractions until my anger fades.

Explore my options.

Choose the option an emotionally-detached leader would choose.

How can others help me with my anger problem?

If I invite others to hold me accountable and I can convince them I am serious, they will help me by confronting me when I become angry and behave badly as a result.

Why am I hesitant to admit my anger problem and work on it?

I have low emotional intelligence.

I don't have much self-discipline.

I've been this way my whole life, and I don't want to change.

I think I am too important to deal with such drivel.

My anger is a defense against my deep-seated feelings of inferiority and unworthiness.

There are no significant adverse consequences to my angry outbursts.

I can't help it.

I'm a weak person.

I'm emotionally immature.

My angry tirades help me get what I want in life.

I'm incredibly selfish and unconcerned about how my behavior affects others.

I just don't care.

How should I react to those who are unwilling to let go of their anger?

I realize that, as absurd as it is, some people are not going to give up the anger in their lives.

I accept that when people decide to be angry and miserable (for whatever reason), that is their right.

I will not allow them to infect me with their anger and misery.

I will not tolerate their expressions of anger in my presence, but instead attach unpleasant consequences to their outbursts.

I will make my position about anger clear.

I will use angry people as examples of how NOT to lead a satisfying and productive life.

I will regard and interact with them with kindness and without becoming angry myself, realizing that their misguided embrace of anger is a terrible burden to bear.

I will model healthy anger management strategies.

I will eagerly coach them if they become open to change.

I will focus more on myself than on others, and I will focus on what I can do instead of what I cannot do.

What if I am unwilling to control my anger and stop expressing it in the SOMC workplace?

I should not serve as a leader at SOMC.

Where can I learn more?

I don't need to learn more.

I just need to start changing what I believe and how I behave.

Southern Ohio Medical Center

Very Good things are happening here