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Managing anger constructively

It isn't easy to manage anger. After all, anger, like other emotions, is part of everyday life. It's an alarm signal that indicates that something is bothering us or that our needs are not being met. Some people deny or suppress their anger because of a lifetime of being told how they should or should not behave. While others find it hard to contain their anger. Here are a few ways to go about managing anger in a respectful, positive way.

1. Admit you are angry

Think of anger as a sign that reminds us of what we like, what we want and what we need. It lets us know that something's not right. So to begin dealing with anger in a constructive way, the first step is to admit that you're angry.

To do so, you have to know yourself well enough to **recognize the signs of anger**: frowning, becoming more and more annoyed by something, arguing, feeling resentful, misunderstood or hurt, yelling, pouting, withdrawal, being argumentative or aggressive, etc.

Suppressing your anger, acting as if it doesn't exist, or simply not talking about it are not healthy ways to manage anger. Because anger 'comes out' or is expressed one way or another, and usually inappropriately.

2. Take a moment

- **Stop, take a breath, calm down**

When a situation triggers anger, it's a good idea to take a little time to lower the tension before reacting. Take a dozen slow, deep breaths. If need be, remove yourself from the situation, take a moment, talk to someone you trust. By letting some time pass between the trigger situation and your reaction to it, your chances of expressing your anger appropriately are far greater.

Remember that the objective here is to calm yourself so you avoid saying or doing things that you might later regret.

- **Be aware of what's going through your mind**

Try to be conscious of what you're thinking. For instance, saying to

yourself, "How he could do that to me!" will only make you angrier, not help you calm down. Try not to imagine, presume or attribute negative thoughts to others.

- **Remember that others don't need to witness your angry outbursts**

As we said earlier, there's nothing wrong with being angry; it's the way anger is expressed that makes all the difference. Letting your anger explode in front of others (hurtful words, swearing, etc.) is not a good idea; in fact, it could have serious consequences for your interpersonal relationships.

3. Distance yourself from the situation so you can identify the source of the anger

Try to pinpoint what has got you in such a state. The cause of the anger is not always obvious. Some people are so used to "stifling" their emotions that they really have to think about it before they can identify the source. What made you angry is not necessarily what just happened to you; maybe it was something that happened yesterday, last week, last month, etc.

4. Think it over

When you've identified the cause, think twice before you act and ask yourself a few questions, such as:

- ✓ *Could the situation have been avoided?*
- ✓ *Am I partially responsible? For example, by not providing clear instructions?*
- ✓ *What can I do to improve the situation?*
- ✓ *What are some realistic solutions?*

5. Express your anger in a respectful, constructive manner

- **Choose a good moment to talk**, once you're calm. For example, go back to see the person in question. Let them

know that you'd like to talk to them about the situation, and see how open they are to that idea. It's a respectful, constructive approach.

- **Describe the behaviour that made you angry, using facts.** For example, "You criticized me in front of the client."
- **Explain the actual effects of their behaviour.** For example, "It upset me and as a result, I had trouble presenting my ideas to the client."
- **Explain what you felt about those effects.** Express your feelings clearly using "I". For example, "I felt disrespected..."
- **Indicate the behaviour you would have preferred.** For example, "If a similar situation should ever come up again, I would like you to wait until we can talk about it in private."

During your discussion, remember to listen to the other person's point of view, to acknowledge any wrong doing on your part where appropriate, and to say you're sorry.

In conclusion

Part of managing one's anger constructively involves learning to express frustration as situations unfold rather than letting frustration and dissatisfaction accumulate over time. It helps us get a better handle on our emotions, and avoid bearing grudges towards others.

Finally, if you're having a hard time managing your anger effectively, if it is difficult for you to act in a constructive manner in challenging circumstances, do not hesitate to access your Employee Assistance Program.

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