



ANGER

From : The Dance of Anger by H. Lerner (2001) Element Books

A Woman in Your Own Right by Anne Dickson (1982) Quartet Books

When you feel anger, think about it. Are you being hurt, are your rights being violated, are you offended on someone else's behalf, have you made too many compromises and now find you can go no further, are your needs for respect, love, warmth not being met adequately.....? Are there other reasons? See if you can locate the source of your anger. It may help you in preparing your response.

Ask yourself: What about this situation makes me angry?

What is the real issue here?

What do I think?

What do I feel?

What do I want to accomplish?

Who is responsible for what?

What am I willing to change

What are the things I will and will not do?

It's OK to have angry feelings: treat them as one of a range of feelings you might have, from love and joy to fear and hurt. Feelings are closely tuned to your needs:

"If a need is fulfilled we experience warmth, harmony, affection; if unfulfilled, we experience hurt, anger, emptiness" (Lerner).

Anger is an emotion, like fear, hurt or love. People who rarely express their anger fear its effect – the damage it may cause other people and things, and its lasting effect on themselves. But feelings don't go away just because you want them to. Repressed anger builds up over time and can feel like a volcano inside, frightening the person who carries it and undermining their ability to be genuinely caring of others. Angry feelings subside when they have been acknowledged and understood. It is important then to know how to express anger safely and constructively, so that you can speak freely.

You have probably heard of Assertiveness training. The skills of assertiveness can be useful in asking for what you want, dealing with criticism, making a complaint, reaching a compromise, being categorical about your rights, and for expressing anger. Assertiveness requires that you respect others and respect yourself; that you are neither bullying nor passive with your angry feelings, and that you are prepared to listen to others.



The Rules of Assertiveness

1. Respect yourself
2. Respect others
3. Make clear requests: don't manipulate to get what you want
4. Don't put others down or blame others for your feelings
5. Don't put yourself down or repress your own feelings
6. Be prepared to compromise – but not to compromise yourself
7. Focus on the present – don't drag up the past
8. Own your own feelings: they have come from inside you. Pay attention to them!

*Common ways of **not** being Assertive*

- being aggressive, loud, abusive, demanding, bullying, taking
- being passive, martyrish, withdrawn, over-giving, 'hurt' instead of angry
- being manipulative, devious, emotionally blackmailing, disapproving, complaining

Anger is an important emotion. Without it we wouldn't be driven forward to succeed or to survive difficult situations; we wouldn't defend the people and things we love; we wouldn't rescue ourselves and others from harm; we wouldn't define ourselves differently from others, nurturing our different views and attitudes to life so that things can change and develop in a network of relationships.

So, it's time to practice finding an angry voice. Try saying out loud, "I am angry", letting yourself connect with the feelings inside you. You may find they get bigger or smaller as you continue. Each time you breathe out, repeat the words "I am angry" until you become comfortable with them. Then write down what you are angry about as the thoughts arise, using just one sentence for each aspect of your anger. This is your Anger List. Make a note of the areas of life in which you are having difficulty expressing your anger. These are the times to be alert to, to think about, and to change your anger pattern.

Try saying "Stop" when you feel angry in response to someone else's words or actions. Try saying "Listen to me" when you feel angry that you are not being heard. Try saying "I feel angry when you say that". These short explicit statements are more effective than all the arguments you may have in your head. When you have the other person's attention, let them know that you appreciate their perspective or feelings ("I can see that you are stressed/hurt/angry...") and follow it with a brief explanation of your own anger (eg "When you are late for a meal, I feel stupid for having spent all that time and care cooking it), and then make a clear request ("What I would like is for you to call me when you are leaving work so I know what time you will be here") and finish with asserting how this would make a difference ("If you could do that, I know I would be much more welcoming when you come home").



The formula is:

I understand.....
But when you.....
I feel.....
I would prefer.....
Because....

Look at your Anger List and try using the formula for each item. You may find as you speak them out loud to yourself that you will want to modify the words slightly. This formula is a way of acknowledging both your own and others' feelings, and to ask for what you want directly, without aggression or manipulation. You will learn how to make it your own, so it is not *just* a formula.

We often accumulate anger by failing to say "No", even though we know we don't want to comply. We persuade ourselves it will be all right, preferable to go along with others 'for a quiet life' and hope to bury any sense of outrage or fear by being 'nice'. The result is that we end up feeling weakened, frustrated and inauthentic. Fearful of saying No directly, we are too passive or too aggressive when we do try. "When you say No, you are refusing the request and not the person" (Dickson). The more able you are to say No to the things you don't want, the more you will find yourself saying Yes to the things you really want – and you won't be harbouring resentments for the future. This next bit is about stating a clear No, and seeking to negotiate a position which really is all right for you and all right for others.

When someone asks something of you, your body lets you know your authentic response. Is there a sinking feeling inside, a tension in your chest and face when you try to respond positively? Or a rush to the head of fear or anger? These are No responses, and need to be listened to. On the other hand, if you feel a smile on your lips, a feeling of opening space inside your body, a relaxation of muscles, this is a Yes response. If you are unsure about identifying your bodily response, you may need more information in order to make your decision. Ask for the information you need and then give yourself time and space to respond – "Can I think about it and call you later?"

The next time you are asked for something which you would definitely like to say No to, try saying "No" firmly and clearly, and walking away afterwards (your bodily behaviour confirms your words). If you have a situation you would like to say No to, but you have some positive feelings about it, try to identify the Yes and the No of your response and be clear with the other person. It can be helpful to use your body as a guide: "When you ask me that, I notice I feel tense inside so I would rather say No. But I would like to do something else..... and I hope you might want to do that too."

If you are someone who has difficulty expressing anger, you will find yourself saying an Indirect No to others – by withholding affection, sulking, complaining about everything, gossiping behind someone's back, doing jobs badly because you didn't



want to do them in the first place, 'forgetting' important occasions because you are harbouring resentment. Think how you feel yourself when you are on the receiving end of an Indirect No – the let-downs and resentments of broken arrangements, the sense that someone isn't being real with you and you can't be real with them. Most of us would prefer the honest No in the first place, even if we have to look elsewhere to get our needs met. We rarely fool others if we are trying to suppress our real feelings and, even if we do succeed in fooling others, they will be all the more cross when they eventually know the truth.

Anger is yours, just as much as any other emotion. Practise it so you become familiar and happy with your own responses. Your feelings are as important as anyone else's, and anger is as important as any other feeling. Use it to make a relationship or a situation better, for yourself and for others around you.

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