



Expressing Anger Appropriately

Certain types of workplace situations will inevitably create feelings of anger for most of us. Anger, like all emotional reactions, serves a useful function in that it can communicate to others that our boundaries are being violated, that we feel disrespected, or that something hurtful or harmful has occurred. In select situations, it can be important to express your anger to a worker or other manager. In doing so, it is important to ensure that your behaviour remains justifiable and respectful at all times. In other words, express your anger appropriately.

Different individuals express anger differently, depending on factors such as personality, upbringing, values and culture. Some people feel very comfortable expressing anger openly. Others tend to mute their anger or refuse to deal with it under any circumstances.

Those who gravitate toward always expressing their anger outwardly (e.g., to other people, to objects, or to the environment) tend to openly demonstrate their aggressive feelings. This can include yelling, swearing, slamming doors, throwing objects, or saying nasty things. Others work very hard to suppress feelings of anger, and may sense anger boiling up inside without letting it out. Those who tend to suppress anger may actually feel angrier than they appear. They might ruminate over the anger situation, be secretly critical of others, harbor grudges, or even fantasize about revenge.

Finding a healthy balance between the expressive and suppressive styles of anger expression can be important, as either extreme can have negative consequences on health, mood and relationships. Healthy and appropriate expression involves neither suppressing anger completely, nor thoughtlessly or indiscriminately letting it out. Healthy expressions of anger take into account other people's rights and feelings and consider the appropriateness of the situation.

Here are tips for expressing anger appropriately:

1. **Gain perspective.** Try to view the situation and your anger triggers objectively. Put the situation in perspective and ask yourself a few key questions: "*Is it worth it for me to get angry?*"; "*Is my anger serving a useful purpose?*"; "*Will this matter to me a day from now? A week from now? Six months from now?*"
2. **Breathe.** Regulate and slow your breathing (as shallow breathing can make the anger experience more intense). Count to 10 or 50 or 100...try to turn the volume down on your anger before you react.
3. **Take a time-out.** Remove yourself from the anger-provoking situation if you start to feel you may have trouble maintaining your composure. Go for a walk, get some fresh air, or temporarily distract yourself before taking any action or making a response.



4. **Put pen to paper.** Write down your thoughts, feelings and possible actions. It is much safer to quietly write hurtful words than to say them aloud. People sometimes find that just the act of writing out their thoughts can calm them down.
5. **Talk it out with a trusted peer.** Since our feelings are raw immediately after an incident, it's a good idea to take a minute to calm down, collect our thoughts, and then talk to someone we trust to gain an objective perspective. Sometimes talking out our thoughts and getting feedback can help us think more rationally.
6. **Be mindful.** Using mindfulness techniques – noticing our feelings without judging them – can allow us to accept them without fueling the anger. Enhancing awareness of our anger also helps us to begin thinking about it rationally.
7. **Use humour.** Add some light-heartedness to a situation (if you can). For example, if the object of your anger is another manager and your thought is, "*He thinks he's such a hot shot*", picture him strutting out of a limo, with shades and a huge gold necklace on, greeting a crowd of screaming fans. Sometimes purposefully looking at a situation from a light-hearted, exaggerated or ridiculous angle can help you gain perspective and diffuse your anger.
8. **Take action.** Once your immediate anger reaction has subsided, verbalize how you feel in a calm and professional manner. Try to use milder words that under-represent your anger. This can help de-escalate the situation. Good words to use are "frustrated" or "concerned". If appropriate, try to use the word "we" as much as possible to soften your statement and indicate a spirit of collaboratively working toward a solution. What is important here is that you express the anger so that it is not bottled up inside. Saying that you are disappointed, frustrated or concerned may seem mild, but it can go a long way in relieving you of the pent up stress that comes from suppressed anger.