

Ten Ways to Manage Anger

Ken Cloke and Joan Goldsmith, authors of *Resolving Conflicts at Work: A Complete Guide for Everyone on the Job* (2000), recommend these techniques to manage anger:

Own it. Don't blame anyone else for your anger. Be responsible for your own intense feelings and for openly and constructively expressing them.

Discover the underlying reasons for it. Ask yourself why you are angry, what triggered your emotion, and what deeper emotions or prior experiences are connected to it.

Share your feelings and perceptions non-judgmentally. Drop all self-justifications, defenses, and judgments you are using to support your anger. Consider avoiding statements such as "you are wrong" and clearly indicate what was done that made you mad. Use "I" statements, report your feelings, say where you think they come from in you, and identify what triggered your emotion.

Ask questions to discover whether your perceptions are accurate. Without making judgments or fixing blame, ask questions to find out more about what happened, so you can get to the bottom of what triggered your anger. Ask if the other person meant to treat you disrespectfully, and if so, why.

Focus on solving the problem rather than blaming others for it. Define the problem as an "it" rather than a "you." Brainstorm possible solutions with your opponent. Take a problem-solving approach to the underlying reasons for your emotional response to the conflict.

Avoid responding defensively. Do not fall into the trap of defending your behavior. Consider the possibility that you may have been wrong, or that you and your opponent may both be right. Explore these possibilities openly. At the very least, if the other person doesn't understand, recognize that you did not communicate your feelings skillfully.

Ask clarifying questions. Ask the other person -- keeping your own tone non-defensive and avoiding hostility -- to clarify what was meant. Ask if your assumptions about what they are saying or doing are correct, and allow them to explain. Listen more carefully if you were not correct the first time.

Clarify your expectations. Say exactly, specifically, and in detail what you expect. If the other person cannot meet your expectations, you can always negotiate more realistic expectations, so they will be clearer about what you really want.

Ask for help. Ask a third person to mediate or facilitate your communication. People are often more polite when company comes to dinner.

Apologize and start over. An apology is a declaration of ownership of what is not working, and a request for improvement. Your apology is an acknowledgment that your relationship with the other person is more important than being right.

The choice is yours. The next time something triggers your anger at work you can respond directly in an angry manner. Or you can manage your anger and discover the reason for it, which you may be able to do something about. If you can resolve the immediate issue and prevent future issues from escalating, both you and your organization will benefit.

Conflict can be defined in many different ways. It can be as simple as people not communicating well with each other. It can be a clash of emotions around a disagreement. It can manifest itself in ceasing communication around a difference of opinion, a disrespectful comment, personality style, or different perspective on personal space. Managing conflict and moving through these difficult situations are critical to individual's job satisfaction and career success and to the organization's productivity and effectiveness.