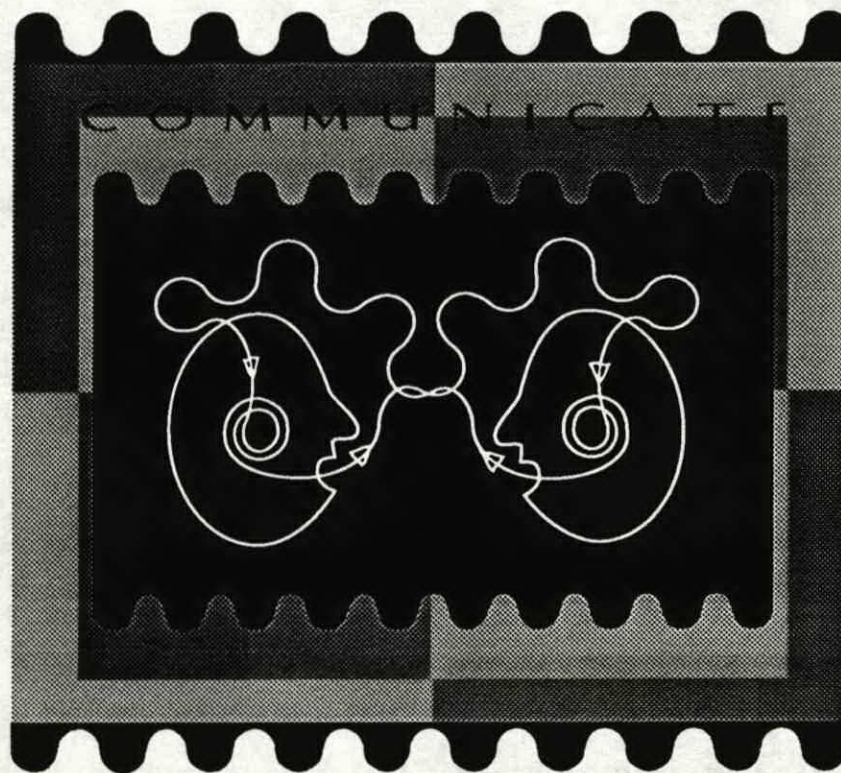
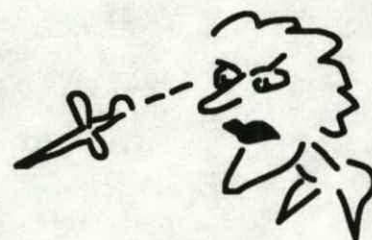

**COLLABORATIVE NEGOTIATION
SKILLS TRAINING**



**Session Six
Dealing With Anger**



Session Six Objectives

Dealing With Anger and Other Emotions

- **Develop awareness of what causes your anger and other people's anger in conflict situations**
- **Become aware of typical patterns in dealing with anger—avoiding or confronting**
- **Learn and practice a model for dealing with anger.**

Dealing With Anger

Dealing With Anger Constructively

It's important to realize that anger in and of itself is neither "good" nor "bad." It is a normal human emotion that all of us feel at various times. It is important to be able to feel angry as well as empowering to articulate the source of your anger. It is also important to not become addicted to feeling angry in lieu of expressing a range of emotions. Because many of us are not good at these things, anger becomes a problem.

Psychologists often refer to anger as a "secondary" emotion. What that means is, if you are honest with yourself, you typically feel emotions like hurt or fear before you feel angry, even if only for an instant. The anger comes up as a means of protecting you from those other feelings.

What is important about anger is not that you feel it but how you express it. Just like conflict, people's problems with anger are that they either avoid their anger or become violent with it. These are both destructive methods of dealing with anger. Many of us, unfortunately, grew up with the message that anger is bad, self-indulgent, or destructive. The reality is, though, that people who repress their anger or avoid it can become physically sick or depressed. In any case, they don't get what they want or need. On the other hand, people who unleash rage inflict emotional or physical damage on others. They, of course, often end up hurting themselves most in the end. Persons on both ends of this anger spectrum need to understand more about fighting fairly through negotiation.

Persons deal with their anger constructively when they are able to identify and express that they are angry, identify the need they have which they would like to satisfy, and express the primary emotions such as hurt or fear that they might feel about the situation. In comparison, the destructive cycle of conflict (from a purely emotional point of view) looks something like this:

CONFLICT—ANGER—RAGE—VIOLENCE

This destructive cycle applies to both the person who "flies into a rage" and the person who suppresses his/her anger, accommodating another's objectionable behavior sometimes for years, only to harbor murderous thoughts which sometimes materialize into action.

Dealing with anger constructively means intervening before the anger turns into rage and channeling it into positive expression. It means experiencing the conflict, feeling the anger, and then beginning to identify the feelings of hurt or fear beneath the anger as well as the unsatisfied needs attached to those feelings. As a useful metaphor, think about gasoline and how potentially destructive it can be—light a match to it and it will explode. Imagine instead pouring that gasoline into a car engine in limited quantities. In this way, you make the car run and have put the gasoline to constructive use.

People who deal with anger destructively get stuck in the “fundamental attribution error.” They blame the other side for creating the situation that has made them angry. They take no responsibility themselves. This approach inevitably leads them to attack the other side, creating a destructive attack/defend escalating spiral of conflict. This approach also reinforces their powerlessness. We all have responsibility when it comes to our own anger and other emotions—the ability to respond in a way that will get our underlying needs met. Later in the essay, we will discuss satisfying one’s own needs more fully.

Here are a few more introductory words about anger. Some people, due to personality or culture, may have difficulty accepting collaborative negotiation as a primary method of dealing with anger and would prefer violence at one extreme or avoidance at the other. Issues of “face” come into play. For instance, the proponent of violence may typically be worried about losing face by using a “softer” method of dealing with anger. On the other hand, the evader may be initially worried about “saving face” for the other side. The proponent of violence must understand that opting for negotiation does not mean giving up one’s anger. It means channeling it constructively with a greater focus on getting one’s needs met. Conversely, the proponent of evasion must understand that feeling one’s anger and expressing it, if done constructively, will not push away others, and, in turn, will help them satisfy their needs.

In general, people need both the will and the skill to deal effectively with anger. The skills needed are described throughout this essay. The will comes from understanding and practicing the skill; but it also comes from a deeper belief that “what goes around comes around.” We live in an evermore interdependent world where taking care of all of us—not just some of us—is becoming increasingly critical to our survival.

Why Do People Get Angry?

People get angry because they have needs that they are not able to satisfy. Unfulfilled needs are manifested through our emotions. For instance, we may have a need to be recognized for our contributions to a group. If we receive no recognition, we may feel hurt and angry at the other members of the group.

Earlier in the essay on the “Elements of the Negotiation Process” we discussed the topic of needs in detail. To recap, there are a variety of categories of needs. The most basic are physical needs like food and water. The more difficult to identify and often to satisfy are our basic emotional or mental needs like the need for survival, fun, freedom, love, self-esteem, belonging, and power. When any of those needs are not satisfied, conflict brews.

Figuring out what you need is sometimes easy but sometimes extremely difficult. We are complex beings with moments in the present inextricably linked to events in the past which are often lost to our consciousness. The person we are fighting is often not the person we are really angry with. But the conflict we are having with them can be a useful catalyst to resolving unhappy or destructive feelings about an earlier relationship with another.

People sometimes get stuck on feeling angry because it can be addictive. When you get angry, adrenaline pulses through your veins and, like any other drug, can numb other more uncomfortable feelings. It's important, however, to recognize that becoming conscious of those feelings and feeling them are important pathways to growth and freedom.

Hearing Someone Out Who Is Angry at You

When someone expresses anger towards us, most of us immediately want to defend ourselves. We may feel an overwhelming desire to beat the other side for self-protection, to establish that we are right and they are wrong, or to make them feel guilty. None of these strategies will ultimately result in a win-win outcome.

Listening to someone who is angry at you is difficult, but that's what you have to do if you want your negotiation to be successful. By seeking to understand them first, you will also succeed in de-escalating their anger. This creates a more cooperative climate where underlying needs can be expressed and met.

Of course, you may not and should not choose to use negotiation for all situations where someone is angry or threatening you. For instance, if someone is holding a knife to your throat, using any means to protect yourself is the only advisable strategy.

If you decide you do want to negotiate, the process you should follow is more or less as follows.

First, you need to acknowledge that there is a conflict between you, and that you want to work to understand how the other side sees the situation as well as help that person understand your point of view. This may often involve taking a deep breath if someone is attacking you. It is very difficult for many of us, no matter how practiced with these skills, to not fall into the trap of a defensive posture. (You may find it best to postpone the discussion to a time when you are both more able to listen to each other. You must be clear in doing this, however, so that the intent of the postponement is not to belittle, suppress, ignore, or invalidate the anger.)

Second, you need to use opening behavior to understand as best you can the perspective of the other side. To do this, you need to acknowledge the other side's feelings and work to establish their real need.

Third, you need to use opening behavior to test your understanding of what has been said, allowing the other side to correct you or provide additional information. When doing this, you need to be careful not to flip things around so that you are talking about your perspective—but instead truly indicate to the other that you are trying to understand their point of view. Do not underestimate how difficult this can be!

Fourth, you need to express your needs and feelings using informing behavior. The pitfall here is to inform and not attack. It is fine to tell the other side that you are angry; it is not fine to put them down in retaliation.

These steps may take a while. There is no premium in dealing with an angry situation quickly. As mentioned above, sometimes agreeing to back off and think about things for a while can help the most in identifying what underlying needs and feelings are really at issue. Take your time. In the long run, that will probably be the most efficient.

Fifth, once you are clear about your and the other side's needs, you should reframe the conflict as a mutual problem to be solved. It may sound something like, "So, I am hearing that what you are most concerned about is ____, and what I need most is ____. Let's work together to see if we can satisfy both of our concerns."

Finally, you want both sides to begin brainstorming alternative solutions. During this phase, tension may rise again as specific proposals are mentioned. Be careful not to fight over any given proposal. Get all ideas out on the table, and then begin to package the best possible solution.

Expressing Your Anger

In expressing your anger, it's important not to become trapped in the fight/flight syndrome—either exploding or suppressing your anger. Both approaches have destructive consequences. People who suppress their anger don't get what they want and, on top of that, get sick or depressed. People who suppress emotion will, with great frequency, "somatize" it, then manifest their unexpressed emotions through depression, physical illness, or accidental injury. How often have you or someone you know had a headache or stomachache after a school meeting instead of stating what was really on his/her mind? Avoiding conflict and anger can have a high cost. Indeed, some say that the emotional underpinnings of life-threatening diseases like cancer are prolonged and unaddressed resentments.

On the other end of the spectrum, some people deal with anger by flying into a rage. Let's define rage as a state of anger where one loses control over his/her impulses. The person in a rage either lashes out verbally or physically to hurt another or destroy him/her. The results? Remorse, injury, imprisonment, or other negative consequences. A manager goes into a rage when she learns that a valued employee unintentionally disclosed confidential information to the competition; she screams that she is going to have her fired. Afterwards, she feels remorse and fear that she has done irreparable harm to a good working relationship. Rage unabated will escalate to a breaking point, and someone will get hurt.

It is very empowering to identify exactly what makes you angry and express that fact assertively but nonviolently to the person who are triggering your anger. It is empowering even if he/she does not agree with you or don't want to change as a result of your anger.

If you are angry at someone and you need to negotiate with that person, it's important for you to figure out which of your needs is going unsatisfied. In other words, you need to take responsibility for identifying the source of your anger even though what you really want to do is simply blame the other person.

Sometimes, it's just easier to blame someone else—but it leaves that person with the power. You need to have the courage to ask for what you want, and if the person won't meet your needs, you need to find some other way of doing so.

Here is a mental model for you to follow when you are expressing anger toward another person.

First, before you blame the other person for your anger, try to determine what you need that you are not getting, what other feelings you are feeling, and what specifically that person could do for you to satisfy that need. It's OK to tell the other person that you are angry; but it's important to recognize that blaming them will not get you what you want. Try not to deny that you are angry.

Second, when and if you have decided to address the other person about the situation, it always helps to start by saying something positive about your relationship.

Third, inform the other of your feelings concerning the situation, both the anger and underlying feelings (like hurt and fear), if you can.

Fourth, inform the other person about what need you must satisfy and your position regarding what you want from him/her. It is best to state your feelings and needs first and then your decided upon position. Stating positions in the heat of anger can often sound like an attack. Stating the underlying need first softens the position and helps you avoid escalation of the conflict.

Fifth, ask the person how he/she feels about or see the situation, and then listen carefully to their perspective.

Sixth, use opening behavior to identify underlying needs and feelings.

Seventh, reframe the conflict as a mutual problem to be solved.

Eighth, brainstorm creative solutions to meet both sides' needs.

This, of course, is a mental model only. Neither communication nor emotion occur so linearly, nor should they. You may find that one of these steps can take you hours, days, or, in protracted conflicts, months or years to complete. But, you do need to cover each of these steps if a constructive outcome is to be reached.

Summary

Anger is a natural human emotion which we all feel. Anger is neither good nor bad; it is how we express it that counts. There are skills that can help you deal with anger, but you also need the will to work collaboratively with another person about a situation that is making you angry.

We have provided you with models for how to handle another person's anger directed at you and how to handle your own anger. These are simple recommendations for a sometimes complicated task. Dealing with anger well is a lifetime task and often may take significant psychological introspection. It is something that can always be improved. This essay should help you learn to more effectively model constructive behavior and teach others to do the same.