

Make good use of your anger

Harness the energy anger generates and make it work for you in the office.

WE are often afraid or wary of anger. We have seen its destructive effects in the office, at home and at play.

How can anger be a friend and not a foe?

There are many myths about anger: It is bad. It is wrong. It is sinful. It is ill mannered. It is uncultured.

Not really. So what is anger?

Anger is basically a natural response to what is we think or feel is not right, unjust, invasive, or plain "bad". How we react to that response often determines if our anger expression is "good" or "bad", appropriate or inappropriate.

Take an inappropriate expression of anger. Rage comes to mind almost immediately. Think of people running amok, indulging in road rage, participating in riots.

Yet rage is almost always our most natural reaction in warding off robbers, molesters or anyone wanting to cause us physical harm. Raging anger releases a high adrenalin rush that empowers us to fight off our aggressors. Here, raging anger saves us.

Bad anger

Another inappropriate and damaging way of expressing anger is passive aggression. This method is embedded in many cultures that emphasise manners and morals.

Throughout the centuries, both Western and Eastern societies have been taught that anger is "bad". So, many people end up suppressing their anger. But anger cannot be suppressed for long.

Hence, passive aggression is expressed by regularly arriving late for appointments, finishing an urgent task at the last minute or making sarcastic remarks of an irritating colleague.

An equally but more damaging expression of inappropriate anger is repression. Here anger is not even admitted and relegated to the

subconscious mind. We are trained by habit to accomplish this so instinctively that we are unaware of this self-sabotage taking place.

Denial becomes second nature to many "nice" employees. Here, anger simmers and the tell-tale signs are lowered productivity at work, unexplained moods of depression or frequent sick days off at work.

Overall work productivity dives and so does your career.

Good anger

So how do we harness anger to make it work for us in the office?

Anger indicates that something is amiss at work.

Are you being overloaded with work that is not part of your job description? Are superiors and colleagues taking advantage of your helpful or generous disposition? Are your clients unreasonable or backing down on promises made? Is the boss looking at you through prejudiced eyes?

Your healthy anger must come to the fore to help you change the situation. Anger has an energy surge that can be channelled constructively. Harness the energy to think clearly over a coffee break or at home.

Use the energy anger generates to brainstorm with yourself or with trusted friends and colleagues over what can and cannot be changed. Do your homework. Plan your strategy.

Assert yourself

Assertiveness is the next step. Assertiveness is the most appropriate expression of anger. Our family and cultural upbringing have often not provided us with models of assertive individuals whom we can emulate. If that is your dilemma, get a book on assertiveness and learn its many techniques.

Familiarise yourself with a technique or two that sits well with your



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personality. Practise them with your sympathetic family members and friends. This is known as role rehearsal.

Empower yourself through familiarisation, then solve the issue at the workplace with the chosen assertive techniques you are now comfortable with. You may even be sufficiently confident to add your unique twist to it.

Confrontation is okay

If assertiveness does not work well in your office setting, the next step may be to confront the situation or person. Confrontation seems to be an ugly word. It has been misunderstood as a form of rage — loud demands, angry voices, unpleasant words and tense body postures.

This is not true. Confront or confrontation does seemingly possess an element of negative juxtaposition, but it is a healthy and positive word in psychology: it promises reconciliation and an end to misunderstanding.

To confront simply means to present — in a calm and collected manner — contradictory facts or opinions to empower you to clear the air. This is much needed in the office or workplace if you are a target of gossip, slander or unfair accusations.

Friend or foe?

Anger will be your greatest enemy in the office if you fail to master it. Like fire, you have to control it or it will destroy you. Do not let it bring

you a demotion or a dismissal.

Manage your anger well and it will be a boost to your career. Use anger as a tool to change, assert and confront.

Anger will always be part of your psyche's make-up to protect you from what you deem unhealthy and unwholesome in the workplace. So let anger work for you to improve your work productivity and office relationships. Be comfortable with anger. Make it your friend, not foe. — Source: Singapore Straits Times/Asia News Network

■ **ARTICLE** by Perry Lee, a lecturer in counselling psychology and workshop speaker. He is the training director and co-founder of Boiling Point Counselling.