**Anger management is really all about mind over matter.** It’s about giving yourself adequate time to respond to your feelings, asking the right questions about your anger, choosing how to respond when you get mad, and deciding if you’re willing to pay the consequences for outrageous behavior.

**Just because you have the right to be angry doesn’t mean you have to exercise that right!**

* **Acknowledge your anger as soon as you experience it.**
* **Use your anger to better understand yourself.**
* **Express your anger without venting**
* **Stop saying you’re “fine” when you’re not.**
* **Confess your anger on a daily basis.**
* **Think of anger as your ally rather than your enemy.**
* **Find healthy ways — like exercise — to let off steam.**
* **Think of anger as a legitimate emotion just like love and joy.**
* **Start saying “Excuse you!” to people who treat you badly.**
* **Let yourself off the hook by forgiving others.**
* **Live in the present, not the past.**
* **Forgo reciprocity — there’s no such thing as getting even.**
* **Come back and discuss the reasons for your anger after you walk away.**

**Anger is neither bad nor good**

Anger serves a variety of positive purposes when it comes to coping with stress. It energizes you, improves your communication with other people, promotes your self-esteem, and defends you against fear and insecurity. (Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., were all angry men — but they turned that anger into social reform that made the world a better place.)

When it leads to domestic violence, property damage, sexual abuse, drug addiction, ulcers, and self-mutilation, anger is definitely not good.

**You want to have emotions but you want to be in control of those emotions.**

# Quantifying your anger

Anger, is not the same as:

**Hostility:** An attitude of ill will synonymous with cynicism, mistrust, and paranoia

**Aggression or violence**: Various types of behavior that are always intended to inflict harm on others

**How often do you get angry (episodic or chronic) and how intense is your anger on a scale from 1-10 (mild – extreme)?**

* **1 - 3 = irritability, annoyed**
* **4 - 6 = anger**
* **7 – 10 = rage**

**Anger is in the eye of the beholder. It’s not the things that happen to you that make you angry as much as it is the way you respond to those things.**

# Views that emphasize anger:

* **Cynicism**
* **Everything is a catastrophe**
* **Everything in life is either black or white**
* **It’s all about me**

You’re always asking the same question over and over: “Why aren’t they treating me fairly?”

The question you should be asking is: “**Why do I get so angry whenever I don’t get what I want when I want it?”** Anger is like a mirror — your own personal mirror. Look into it and see what comes back at you. Maybe you’re spoiled or you’re a bit grandiose in what you expect of yourself and others at work. Maybe they’re not the problem — maybe you are.

Look around at the other people you work with. **Are they as angry at work as you are? If not, and if they’re doing the same work, you should ask yourself why. Why are you angry and they’re not?**

**All that anger that you’re spewing out over the years can rob your family of energy, make them ill, and ruin their careers as well.**

# Managing your anger today

## Take immediate action

Anger, by its very nature, is meant to be short lived. It comes and it goes like a wave hitting the beach. For most people, anger is over within five to ten minutes.

How do you settle for just being annoyed?

* Don’t think of the incident or situation as more serious than it is
* Don’t take it personally
* Don’t blame the other person
* Don’t think about revenge
* Keep striving for a non-angry way of coping with the situation
  + Listen to nice music
  + Think about something pleasant
* Take some type of action to adjust to or correct the annoying situation.

# Walking away but coming back

This is an alternative for flight or fight. The problem is that neither of these extreme options helps you manage anger. If you decide to stand and fight, you need to remain angry long enough to overcome the threat — and the intensity of your anger may become accelerated in the process. On the other hand, if you retreat from the threat, you end up taking your angry feelings with you. You can outrun the threat, but not your own emotions.

You can disengage (walk away) initially (“Excuse me. Give me a minute. I’ll be right back,”), but return later (“Okay, what was it you wanted to say?”), after you’ve calmed down sufficiently to discuss how to resolve the conflict. This is the most mature way to handle anger-provoking problems, but also the one most people are least likely to choose.

# Stopping the rage

* Focus on your anger and the reactions to your anger rather than the source of your anger
* Respond rather than react
  + Your response is predictable (not unpredictable as when you are angry)
  + Thoughtful
  + Not impulsive
  + In control
* Repeat to yourself as many times as necessary, “This too shall pass.”
* Breathe
  + Take a deep, exaggerated breath in through your nose.
  + Hold the breath for a count of one
  + Now, exhale in an exaggerated way through your mouth.
  + Repeat the exercise at least ten times
  + Think the word release with each exhale. This is your mind’s command to the body to let go of this unwanted tension. Your body will follow the command.
* Just by being quiet for a few moments, while you continue to formulate your response to anger, you’ll begin to calm down.
* Ask yourself 4 questions
  + Who am I really angry at?
  + Is this the right time and place to be angry?
  + Why am I angry?
  + Is the intensity of my anger consistent with why I’m angry?
* Come up with other alternatives as to why the other person did what she did to trigger your rage
  + Then pick the one that will produce the least adverse emotional consequences
* Say aloud to yourself, “Stop!” and shift your attention to something else.
* Engage in some positive rumination — otherwise known as daydreaming (imagine something positive)
* Instead of imagining yourself in another positive situation, imagine yourself in the same situation that caused your anger, but without any feelings of anger.
* Imagine yourself in the same (or different) situation, but feeling a negative emotion other than anger (for example, sadness).

# Speaking out in anger

Screaming at someone that he’s a “@#$%head!” communicates nothing but raw anger. It doesn’t tell the person why you’re angry.

**You need to use your anger to educate, inform, and share that part of yourself that is hurt, sad, frustrated, insecure, and feels attacked with the person who tapped into these feelings.**

1. **Come up with a label to identify the intensity of your anger.**

For example, are you annoyed, irritated, mad, irate, or in a rage? Start by saying, “I feel. . . .” Don’t say, “I think. . . .” What you’re going for here is your feeling, not your thoughts about how unpleasant the other person was.

1. **Identify what really triggered your anger in the first place**
2. **Ask yourself what it would take to help you return to a non-angry state.**

For example, “I would appreciate it if he would ask his friends to leave when I get home from work so we can have some one-on-one time.”

When you’re able to go through these three steps inside your head, see if you can actually have that conversation with the person you’re angry with.

When speaking up in anger keep it short.

It is not what you say; it is how you say it:

* Keep pace slow and volume low

# Preventing anger

**Anger is the emotion of intolerance. Intolerance means you don’t accept another person’s viewpoint or behavior. Anger says that you think you’re right and the other person is wrong. It can’t be any simpler than that.**

Anger defends the listener against any change in his way of thinking. Instead of accepting the challenge of an honest difference of opinion, the intolerant person resorts to intimidation, insult, or withdrawal — all fueled by anger —as a way of rigidly holding on to his beliefs.

Instead of being defensive (that’s what intolerance is all about!), go on the offense. Say to the other person, **“Tell me more about that. I’d like to understand how you arrived at that opinion. This is your chance to educate me.”**

**Look for points of agreement**

**Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut.**

# A Zen approach to overcoming anger

Anger is often an immediate but irrational reaction based on a notion we have in our heads.

Whether the event is trivial or significant, the cause of anger is always the same. Underlying the emotional tumult, there is a need that is not being met and that you expect to be met. The demand, in a very broad sense, is the “because” underlying our anger. “I was angry because . . . .”

If you can pause to consider what your demand (or need or expectation) is when you feel anger arising, you will have gone a long way toward changing it. Whether or not you follow any of the other suggestions in this book, you will find this simple exercise to be of great value. In fact, certain types of anger may dissolve with no other effort.

So the first step is to own your anger. As long as you don’t act on it, no one but you will keep score no matter how many times a day you get angry.

One of the things that you realize when you see the nature of the self is that what you do and what happens to you are the same thing. Realizing that you do not exist separately from everything else, you realize responsibility: You are responsible for everything you experience. You can no longer say, ‘He made me angry.’ How could he make you angry? Only you can make you angry.

On the temple it is written even still . . . that the giver should be thankful; only then is it a sharing. . . . Somebody accepted you through your gift. He could have rejected [it], there was no necessity to accept it. The giver should be thankful. Then it becomes a sharing, otherwise it is always a bargain. You are expecting something—something more valuable than you have given. When someone becomes enlightened, he can share, and he will do whatsoever he can just to share it.

When confronted with someone else’s anger, use these steps.

1. Make space before speaking or responding. Take some deep breaths.
2. Check the face and body of the person in front of you to understand what’s going on. Observe physiological cues. Watch especially for changes in the trust level. When a person becomes more relaxed, their eyes will be open and they will lean slightly toward you.
3. Consider the consequences of not doing anything—whether something that might be helpful in the short run may lead to harm later.
4. Ask yourself: What assumptions am I making? Ask the person what the problem is. Consider your involvement in causing it.
5. Respect and empathize with both your own boundaries, values, and limitations and those of the other person.

A conflict may be the result of differing values, for instance, two family members disagreeing about whether to take care of a parent in a nursing facility or at home. One wants safety for her, the other wants her happiness. The safety-minded person might come clean and admit, “I can’t be here all the time; I’m afraid she might hurt herself.” The other might say, “I would always be upset with myself if I didn’t support Mother’s wishes.” Then it becomes an argument about concerns instead of positions.

1. Speak from right attitude. Ask yourself, “What do I really need to communicate to this person?” and refrain from venting your feelings for other motives. Check for self-indulgence, ill will, potential harm in one’s own words and actions. Ask yourself not only what must I say, but how must I say it.
2. Deliberately, do not take revenge. In Buddhism, the basic vow is benefiting all beings, not everyone except this particular person.

If you are a man who leads,  
Listen calmly to the speech of one who pleads;  
Don’t stop him from purging his body Of that which he planned to tell.  
A man in distress wants to pour out his heart  
More than that his case be won.

—The Instructions of Ptahhotep

If you don’t like what just happened, you have the opportunity to change the next installment in the soap opera of your life in grand or subtle ways. Human intelligence gives you the power to react other than by instinct or habit. Intelligence is the power of choice. Anger cripples rational thought and therefore limits your choices. But by using the full power of your intellect and choosing not to act out of anger and habit, you can increase the odds that the events of the future will be more to your liking.