

Dealing with an Angry Individual

Benefits of dealing with anger

Dealing effectively with your own emotions can be a challenge, but it's an important part of developing empathy. Using empathy – the ability to understand how other people feel – is a productive starting point for dealing with anger in other people.

You may recall a time when someone helped deal with your anger. Or perhaps you thought of a situation where someone's behavior made you even more angry. Remembering what it felt like when you were angry, and how you reacted when another person engaged with you, helps you to understand how other people might feel when you try to manage their anger. This is known as empathy. When you're able to empathize with angry subordinates, superiors, or peers, you'll benefit by promoting change in how those people behave toward you in the future. You'll also define the boundaries of your relationships by letting people know appropriate ways of behaving toward you.

There are several benefits to dealing effectively with angry individuals.

- **Promote behavior change** – Dealing effectively with an angry individual promotes change in how that person behaves around you in future interactions. Put simply, it will help you build a positive relationship, which will help the angry person understand what type of behavior will garner positive results.
- **Define boundaries of relationships** – Personal boundaries are rules or limits that define reasonable and permissible ways for other people to behave around you. It's vital to be consistent with your responses when someone steps outside those limits, and to respect the other person's boundaries. This helps you define the limits of future interactions with the angry individual.

Strategies for dealing with anger

Dealing inappropriately with another person's anger can often make a situation worse. The other person may become even angrier, or may conclude that getting angry is the appropriate way to deal with you.

There are three common ineffective ways that some use to cope with angry people.

1. **Ignoring** – It's uncomfortable to deal with an angry person, but ignoring the anger won't make the problem go away. Acknowledging that a person is angry is the first step to dealing with the situation.
2. **Shutting them down** – People that are angry often feel the need to express their emotions. Shutting them down through nonverbal communication such as "shushing" is disrespectful and sends the message that their feelings aren't legitimate.
3. **Competing** – Meeting anger with more anger only serves to exacerbate the situation. If you attempt to compete by shouting down at an angry individual, or otherwise overreact, the situation can spiral out of control. It may even lead to a physical confrontation.

There are four main strategies that can help you manage when you're in a situation where you have to deal with someone's anger. You'll need to manage your own anger first, identify the underlying source of the anger, assert yourself verbally, and provide the person with feedback.

Manage your own anger

Appropriately managing an angry person starts with being aware of your own feelings of anger, and recognizing what your own triggers are. It's easier to deal with an angry individual when you're aware of your own feelings. Recalling what it feels like when you're angry creates self-awareness and allows you to empathize with the other person. Self-awareness also involves recognizing your own anger triggers. If you're aware that whining or being shouted at are triggers that make you angry, you can mentally prepare for them. It also helps to anticipate and practice how to deal with your triggers.

Identify the source

This involves gathering information about the issue, setting up a meeting, and conducting the meeting appropriately. When you meet with people who are angry, they may not always see an issue in the same way that you do. This is particularly true if the anger is directed toward you. To successfully resolve the issue, it's important to listen to the other side of the story. Let the angry person have a say, and then reflect back on what was said without judgment. If the anger starts to escalate, or the person is repeating points or speaking in absolutes, it's time to gently and respectfully cut off that part of the conversation, and state your response. After you've had your turn to speak, find the points that you both agree on, and work toward a resolution.

Assert yourself

When people are angry, emotions run high. Sometimes, this means that angry people resort to unacceptable behavior. This can include personal attacks, verbal putdowns, and threats. In these cases, it's important to be calm and assertive. If negative behavior persists in the meeting, explain your concerns and try to get the meeting back on track. Remember that you shouldn't have to endure abuse. If you feel threatened or uncomfortable with someone's behavior, state the problem. You could suggest taking a break or rescheduling the meeting. If the negative behavior continues or escalates, ask the person to leave, or leave yourself.

Evaluate and provide feedback

This involves evaluating if the anger was legitimate, providing feedback, and seeking a solution to the issue. After you've listened to the angry person's side of the story, you'll need to evaluate whether the anger is legitimate, and whether the behavior is appropriate to the situation. It may help to inquire whether there is something in the work environment that is causing anxiety. Once you've evaluated the anger, it's time to provide constructive feedback. Your goal should be to help people get over the anger and improve performance, not to demoralize them.

There are four main strategies that can help you manage when you're dealing with someone's anger in the workplace. The strategies are to manage your own anger, identify the underlying source of the individual's anger, assert yourself verbally if negative behavior continues, and evaluate the issue and provide constructive feedback to the angry individual.

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