

A Second Look at Anger

Psychologists have estimated that humans are capable of experiencing hundreds of emotions during the course of a single day. The range is even larger when certain emotions combine, often in confounding ways. For example, why do we often cry (a sign of sadness) at weddings (a joyful event)? But certainly the most dreaded and least understood emotion is *anger*. Throughout the centuries, philosophers have weighed in on this particular emotion in order to explain its toxic nature:

“Anger is short-lived madness.” - Horace

“Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.”-Robert Ingersoll

“Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret!”- Ambrose Bierce

But perhaps Eckert Tolle’s observation in his book **The Power of Now** is the most revealing: *“Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath.”* Indeed, anger is generally considered a secondary emotion that is frequently triggered by one of four primary emotions: fear, frustration, humiliation and desperation. This is not an excuse for anger; rather, it is a mandate for each of us to address our primary emotions before they deteriorate into uncontrollable anger.

Psychologist Ari Novick, Ph.D., a leading expert on anger management, suggests developing eight skill sets that will reduce or eliminate this destructive emotion:



- Learning to filter out stress
- Developing empathy for others
- Learning to *respond* – not *react*
- Improving “self talk”
- Learning to communicate assertively
- Learning to modify expectations
- Learning to forgive
- Learning to detach and think things over

Even partial mastery of just a few of these skills will prove helpful. Consider the following potential “road rage” scenario: You are enroute to an important appointment and find yourself behind a slow-driving, elderly motorist. A degree of empathy, some healthy “self talk,” an ability to forgive and a willingness to detach from the situation will probably be enough to avoid an ugly outburst and a dangerous spike in your blood pressure. But if you are totally stressed out, time-pressured, self-absorbed and reactive, a very different outcome may ensue.

Learning to manage anger helps the individual as well as his/her family and co-workers! If you find yourself ready to turn the page on anger, your Employee Assistance Program is available to help you begin this rewarding journey in a confidential, professional manner. Certainly this would be a positive decision with which to begin the New Year!