



ANXIETY RELIEF CENTER

Reduce Distress. Restore Well-Being. Repair Relationships.

7 Secrets to Overcoming Anger

Regain Self-Control and Save Your Most Important Relationships!

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Honestly, I'm usually skeptical about e-books. They often overpromise and create the illusion that change and success are easy. I mean, how much can a few pages really do to improve someone's life?

On the other hand, many people don't have the time for, or trust, counseling, or at least not at the moment. They need to feel better sooner than later. And others, who later became my patients, tell me that knowing my approach helped them decide to "take the plunge" and work with me in my office.

So I decided to provide a short-hand version of some of the key lessons that have helped my clients. Really, applying just one of these can lead to you feeling better, and doing better.

So here's my one disclaimer: there is no simple way to change, unless YOU are motivated to do some work, take some chances, try and try again when you slip or fall, and be honest with yourself.

If that describes you, even a little bit, I hope you'll keep reading and keep moving toward the life you want and deserve.

Secret #1: Waiting for the Smarter You

Anger isn't about negotiation, intelligence, or strategy. Anger is about attacking something or someone when you feel you are being attacked. It's God's way of saying, "fight back or suffer the consequences." And in some rare instances, it really can be useful.

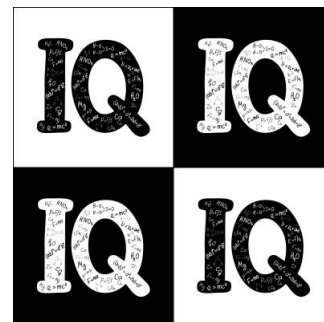
But think about the last time you got really angry. What was going on? Did yelling, criticizing, pushing, blaming or attacking actually work? Did the problem you were having get solved? Did other problems then arise? And how did you feel about yourself five minutes or five hours after you let loose?

The truth is, **everyone tends to act a little bit dumber** when they are angry. Our IQ seems to drop about 20 points. And we do things we probably wouldn't advise to our friends, kids or loved ones.

It's almost a physiological thing. When we're on the war path, blood rushes to our muscles, our heartbeat increases, our vision gets constricted, our body temperature rises, and we move with speed, not strategy. And that's great if you're a soldier on point in Kabul.

But it's not so useful when you're at the local bank and someone cuts in line in front of you. Or if you're in bed with your wife and she tells you that she overspent on the credit card again.

So Secret #1 is simple. **Stop. Stop and wait for your IQ to come back to its normal level.** If you were locked out of your car and needed to get somewhere and I told you that in about 15 minutes someone would come along and solve this problem, would you feel better (a bit) and wait? Or would you just try to break into the car?



Well, the smart you is the one who will come around in about 15 minutes. But are you willing to wait for those minutes before you act?

Secret #2: Do the Opposite of Anger...Apply Kindness and Respect

This might seem like asking for the impossible, but it doesn't really have to be that difficult. Though it does take some focus and practice.

If you think about it, acting with kindness is the exact opposite of the instinct of anger (which is to attack and hurt). And doing the opposite is especially powerful. Think about it: emotions like anger move us toward actions like attacking. Well, the opposite rule works too! Actions can move us toward certain feelings. (For example, ever notice that if you laugh, or even just smile, you feel happier?)

So this is especially useful if you experience anger as a kind of everyday problem. What you need to do is **be decent and maybe even a little bit kind**.

Why does this work? Well, first, kindness and decency are rewarding, they give you a sense of control and dignity, and help relax and distract you from anger. Also, the other person can start to feel safe too, and with safety comes the possibility of communication and a better relationship.

Is this guaranteed? No...sometimes decency and kindness won't reverse your feeling. You might still feel angry. Why? Because while you're being kind on the outside, you might still in the back of your mind be saying, "What a rat jerk" (we'll talk about that kind of self-talk in Secret #5).

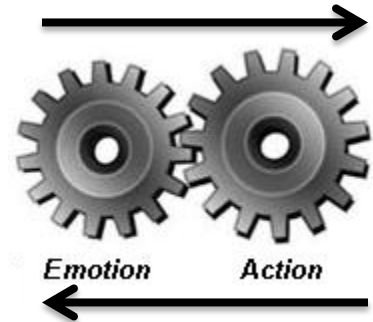
In other words, you're not really being decent, you're being fake decent. And fake decent does little to make you feel better. It's not really opposite action until you do one more thing. That's Secret #3 below.

Secret #3: See the Other Guy's Point of View

The fancy word for this is *empathy*. It's a good one to learn. I've seen it save marriages, families, business relationships, and even careers. It means that you see a kernel of truth in what the other person is saying. Even when they are wrong, obnoxious, and crazy-making! Usually there is a small bit of truth in even the most ridiculous statements. Put yourself in his or her shoes.

How does this work? Well, in two key ways. First, it's almost impossible to stay angry when you can see a little bit of where the other guy has a point. That's the power of empathy. It's like a super strong fire-retardant: just a little bit puts out some big flames. So you feel better almost right away.

Second, the other person realizes that, "Hey, he's not yelling or disagreeing with me, he's listening!" And with that, the need to fight seems to dissolve. An actual conversation can suddenly break out.



I know...you're probably saying, "That's crazy, I'm not going to get rolled over and just give in." Well, I'm not asking you to. But I *am* asking you to stop doing what doesn't work, which is acting out of righteous anger.

Still not sure you want to do it? I understand. Being right and winning are pretty damn appealing. But let me ask you: How good do you feel when you are angry? How is it affecting your body and mind? How do the important others in your life act around you? Are they getting closer to you, or farther from you? How much is being right and winning costing you?

Secret #4: Replace Feeling Entitled With Feeling Gratitude

Assuming others owe you something starts for most of us as young children. We rarely see our parents' or caretakers' generosity as choices they made. We usually see what we were given as an obligation of theirs.



This makes sense. After all, from birth, most of us got what we needed, without earning it and not having to arrange for it. The care we were given, the food made for us, the concern of others, etc. So we assume we deserve these things because of who and what we are (no one really gave us any other explanation).

So others' *owed* us praise, love, money, service, loyalty, admiration, etc., and when we didn't get it, we felt betrayed and angry. When we see this in children, we call them spoiled. When we see it in adults, we call it arrogance.

But what would happen if you stopped seeing what you get as an obligation by others and started seeing it as a gift? What would happen if you realized that what you get from others is a choice *they* get to make? It might free you to see that if someone can't meet your needs, your choice is to get your needs met elsewhere. You'd be free of the burden of resentment, and free to make your life better.

So the next time you feel let down by someone, ask yourself, "Do they really owe me? Is this an obligation they have to me? Is my not getting what I want my problem, or their problem? And is anger the best way to solve this problem?"

Secret #5: Speak Your Truth, But Leave Out the Judgment

I'm the last person to say that you need to give up judging. You deserve the life you wish to create for yourself, and being able to figure out what is "good" and "bad" from your point of view is pretty helpful. It's how you know what you want to eat, where to live, how to work, who to date or marry, etc.



The problem arises though when your judgments are really poorly disguised attempts at getting others to change.

Think of it this way: when thinking leads you to thoughts of how the *other person should change* then that's really criticism and that will inspire anger. On the other hand, when your thoughts lead you to what *you* should do, then it's factual thinking, and will probably inspire problem solving.

Try this easy example: "That driver is too slow."

- A *factual observation* leads to you thinking what? ("I need to get out of this lane" or "I'm not going to let that driver ruin my drive to work") Do you notice what a factual truth feels like? You don't get really hooked into anger or resentment.
- A *critical observation* leads to what next thought? ("Some people don't even know how to drive" or "What a selfish jerk" or "How lame is he/she?") How does *that* kind of thinking feel?

Bottom line: when things aren't the way you want them to be, try focusing on the facts, and less on judging how others are screwing up and need to change.

Secret #6: Stop Focusing on How You're a Victim

I've never found an angry person or an angry moment where someone didn't feel like a victim. As long as we have a fair complaint, we feel righteous in getting angry and acting on that. We learn this as kids, "Yeah I hit him, but he teased me"; and we continue it as adults, "Yeah I pushed my wife, but it's nothing compared to what she does."



Too often, the precursor to anger is a game we all sometimes play. It's called, "Who's the Bigger Victim?" and it's like a race to the bottom where we argue over who hurt who first, or who hurt who worse.

What to do? There are two things to consider whenever your anger feels justified: First, even if you are the victim of another person's unjust behavior, ask yourself if anger the best tool to change the situation? And two, has viewing yourself as a victim become a habit you have? You may not always be the victim you think you are.

Secret #7: Take Care of You

This is one idea that seems obvious, but too few people really try it.

Remember, anger often arises when we expect others to be obligated to us (see Secret # 4 above). But it works the other way too. We often get angry with others when we feel we've been taken advantage of, or aren't appreciated. In other words, there is a sense of obligation that was never really discussed or agreed on.



It's as if there are special and usually unstated rules about who owes what to whom, and when those rules get broken, we get angry. Most of my patients who come to anger management classes or individual therapy just don't get how someone as nice as them—as caring, thoughtful, and considerate—can be so unappreciated and misunderstood.

Often times, these patients *really are* caring and thoughtful. The problem is, they thought that since they were going out of *their way to be nice, the other person should too*. Obligation inflation is at work. Can you see how this can lead to tremendous resentment? And how that is followed up with a sense of being a victim?

The solution is twofold and pretty commonsensical. First, if you're going out of your way for others, realize that this is *your* choice. Maybe you're going out of your way from a genuine feeling of concern and love. And, maybe a part of you is hoping the other person will feel more connected and loving toward you too.

But it might makes sense to let the other person know that this is what you want and expect. Let them in on the situation, on your needs and hopes and feelings. If you expect them to mind-read, you're going to be in for a disappointment eventually.

And second, try treating yourself with the same respect and generosity you want others to have toward you. Show the world that you're worth that kind of care by believing it yourself, and acting that way. My patients report that when they do this, they find the energy they spent getting angry and hurt and acting righteous dissolves, and instead they actually enjoy their lives.

I'll keep the same good thought for you too. Take care.

About the Author

Aaron Deri is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and founder of the Anxiety Relief Center in Ventura, California. His clinical experience includes private practice, outpatient community clinic, residential psychiatric treatment, and non-profit settings. He has worked as a certified facilitator for domestic violence batterers treatment groups, has led traumatic grief bereavement groups for adult survivors of violent loss, anger management for teens, crisis intervention for domestic violence and sexual assault victims, is certified in child and adolescent crisis intervention (*Life Space Crisis Intervention*), and has completed an externship in couples Emotionally Focused Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Mr. Deri holds a Master of Science degree in Counseling from San Diego State University and is a published researcher.



The Anxiety Relief Center's mission is to help clients overcome anxiety, anger and depression, by effectively experiencing and managing intense negative emotions and helping patients get closer to having the best human experience possible. This is achieved when our clients save—and grow—in their family relationships, careers and communities. Their world gets bigger as they rediscover love and joy in their families, jobs, friendships, and in themselves.

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