

SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING AN ANGRY CLIENT OR ANYONE ELSE!

"If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow."
- Chinese proverb

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It's a fact: escalating anger causes disruption in the attorney client relationship. Your client is very often upset with the opposing party (and his/her attorney), and when things are not going well, or if he/she receives a big billing statement- you too! Anger is contagious, so it's critical to learn how not to catch it!

Remember that anger is a natural emotion, and it acts like an alarm meant to protect us as humans. Why? Because when our brain perceives some real or often just perceived threat or wrong perpetrated by another person, nature has automated our mind and body to go into protection mode. In fact, our Amygdala in our primitive brain, part of our limbic system, sends instant messages to our body to create protective chemicals like adrenalin which gives our muscles, lungs and heart a big boost so we can act. We literally can't stop ourselves from being angry- however we can pause to **choose how to respond to our anger and reverse the auto-response**. Even the most agreeable, calm people have legitimate feelings of hostility in challenging situations. But those who don't react explosively are emotionally intelligent. They have developed skills which allow them to manage the mind-body experience.

Our goal is to consciously respond -- not instinctively react. If your client or opposing counsel gets you to react in anger, you have lost control of yourself. As Elizabeth Kenny once said, "He who angers you, conquers you." When we allow our anger to rule our reasoning, we lose our ability to make reliable decisions. We lose our sense of self, our thinking becomes impaired, and we "lose it." That's when we make "the greatest speeches we'll ever regret!" We voluntarily give away our power when we delegate the authority to anger to rule our reason.

Try the following proven strategy anytime your client, employee, boss, or anyone else attacks your ideas, actions, beliefs, or acts in any way disrespectfully.

To help you remember this 10-step strategy, you may find the acronym **HARD LOVE** helpful and apropos.

1.Halt

1. Halt: Stop yourself from reacting -- don't say anything. Listen and consciously breathe slowly to deactivate the auto-anger reaction. If speak angrily, you will invite more hostility.

2.Anger control

Anger is a negative emotion that you can feel in your body. Immediately direct your mind to your physical sensations. Some typical reactions are dryness in the throat, tightness in the neck or chest, swirling in your solar plexus.

As you read this take a moment to close your eyes and imagine someone saying something that "pushes your buttons." Identify your physical reaction to the verbal battle. Once you recognize your body's autoreply to verbal pain, you gain the key to override its power over you.

3. Reverse reaction

You can consciously reverse this auto-reaction through your awareness. For example, if you sense a knife in your solar plexus when you're feeling accused, gently "remove the weapon." "Drink" refreshing water for your dry throat.

Deliberately take calm slow breaths as you make this reversal until you are calm and centered. You still have not said a single word to the 'attacker'.

4. Disengage

Now that you have detached physically, your brain is ready to disengage mentally. Focus on the issue, not the person's words or behavior. Separate the person from the problem. Just because your client or opposing counsel says something offensive doesn't mean it is true or you must accept it as a fact. His/her perceptions in the moment are just thoughts. You don't have to be defensive or convince him

Release any need to prove you are right: from your perspective, you are right. If you don't engage, the fight has ended. When you let go, you disable your "opponent." He/she cannot control you if you don't get upset. You win control, since the other person has succumbed to his/her own anger.

5^[MF1]. Listen

Listen effectively

Listen to every word without resistance. (This doesn't mean you agree!) Don't prepare your response. Listening demonstrates a willingness to understand, which promotes a reciprocal receptivity. Non-contentious listening deflects hostility and gives you powerful information to resolve the real issues.

Openly mirror

Restate, in a calm, neutral tone, the essence of what was said. For example: "You stated that you were angry because you felt the bill is too high." Or: "You are concerned that we did not respond to your phone call yesterday"

By mirroring what the other person said, you have not agreed -- you are merely demonstrating your understanding of what you heard. This immediately shows respect.

Voice open-ended questions

Follow up a mirrored statement with an open-ended question, such as: "What are your specific concerns about the bill? How may I address your concerns? Pose clarifying questions like: "What do you need? What do you think will work?"

Engage in "solutioneering"

Jointly problem solve, brainstorm solutions. Clarify what would work for you, and the other person. For example, clarify all time entries on the bill. Be willing to make minor adjustments rather than go to a time-consuming fee dispute hearing. Decide as to how you will return phone calls within 24 hours or less by having your staff return a phone call. Address the underlying needs of your client or whoever you are

Our negative emotions challenge our relationship at work and at home. We need to consciously analyze what we are feeling so that we can use the tools above to take appropriate actions to de-escalate conflict. Our profession is such that conflict is the mainstay. As professionals, we need to increase our emotional intelligence, so that we can more comfortably deal with the negative emotions of those around us. We will be happier and less stressed if we remember the three Ps- Pause, Plug into how we are feeling, and Proceed with caution.

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