

Keep a lid on your anger

You have the power to turn down the heat when your emotions start to boil over

IN YESTERDAY'S article, we discussed the negative impact of anger on your ability to think rationally, which in turn affects your productivity.

Manage your anger with a three-pronged approach, which advocates:

- Increasing awareness of events that trigger stress and negative emotion;
- Using a coping strategy when you find anger has boiled over; and
- Reflecting and learning from the anger, once it has passed.

Awareness of stressors

"Forewarned is forearmed" goes the saying, so increasing your awareness allows you to deal with stresses before they become performance-impacting.

Everyone reacts to stress in different ways. Some relish the challenge of tight deadlines, whereas others buckle under this strain, fearful of failure.

Considering whether you are the controlling, ambitious and competitive "Type A" person or the relaxed, sociable and controlled "Type B" personality may be a good starting point.

Next, think about specific situations that get your emotional juices flowing.

Make a list of what you do at work and consider making positive changes where you identify areas that add stress to your day, such as:

■ **Conflicting demands.** Multi-tasking can aid productivity in routine work, yet often it is unproductive. It is not always possible to achieve everything, so it is important to clarify priorities and sequence important tasks.

■ **Too much work.** Stretching the day by bringing work home at nights and weekends can lead to burnout. Spending

time handling work-related e-mail, text messages and calls in your personal time is an early sign.

■ **Too little work.** Repetitive and routine work may result in high physical but low mental demands. Boredom can result in lower productivity and increased staff turnover, especially in Gen X and Y employees.

■ **Presence of ambiguity.** People prefer certainty. A little ambiguity is fine as it fuels curiosity, and resolution can raise confidence levels. Clarity, consistency and regularity in communications help to reduce ambiguity.

■ **Equity and fairness.** Pride in a job well done is important and being respected feels good. We feel threatened and stressed when we are ignored, treated unfairly, not rewarded or given a lower status.

■ **Social connections.** Technology can be a great productivity tool but it can be overused. Rather than limiting your social interaction to texting or e-mail, opt for balanced communications with face-to-face contact.

Being aware of the things that concern you allows you to proactively respond to and manage them in a more rational and productive way.

Coping with anger

Psychologists say that the window of opportunity for you to manage your anger is very small. You have only a couple of seconds to intervene and manage the situation, so you need to be aware of the onset of anger.

Try this five-step coping strategy

during those initial moments to put you back in control:

1 Awareness

Be aware of your emotions starting to boil over. Acknowledge that you have the power to turn down the heat, just as you can for a simmering pan.

2 Breathe

Focus attention on your breathing. Breathe in slowly, feel the air going down to the lungs, purse your lips and blow it out through the mouth making a "phew" sound.

3 Count

Count each breath. Maintain deliberate breathing for five cycles. Breathing is calming and gives you sufficient time to turn down the heat.

4 Detach

Focusing on your breathing is like taking a physical step back. Take a mental step back too. Look at the situation through the eyes of the person who is making you angry. Think about the outcome you want instead of giving in to your anger.

5 Engage

As you begin to feel calmer, more relaxed and detached, you know you have used the "time-out" strategy effectively to position yourself to re-engage the other party positively.

Learning by reflection

Learning is best viewed as a process rather than an outcome, and not every intervention will be as successful.

The more you choose to perform the steps, the more skilled you will become



at managing stress and anger.

It is very important to reflect after each intervention to increase your skill and confidence levels. Consider issues such as:

■ **Outcome.** How well did I do in managing that stressful situation?

■ **Ease of use.** In what ways am I finding it easier to use these techniques?

■ **Importance.** How important a situation was it, and was there much riding on it?

■ **Impact.** In what ways did my performance impact the situation I found myself in?

■ **Context.** How did I, the situation or the other person limit those outcomes?

■ **Confidence.** How confident am I about the benefits that the techniques provide?

■ **Discovery.** What things did I learn, which allow me to make changes in my life?

Managing anger not only applies to yourself, but also to the people whom you interact with on a daily basis.

As your confidence rises, you will see how taking a more emotionally intelligent approach to your life can result in less stress and produce positively productive results.

Article by Patrick O'Brien, managing director of The Amanuenses Network, which delivers soft-skills training solutions that focus on team productivity and personal effectiveness. For more information, visit www.Amanuenses.net

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