

Breaking the Anger Habit at Work and at Home

“I’m angry as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore!” Who can forget that memorable phrase yelled out in the movie, Network.... or Michael Douglas, playing a frustrated, overly stressed employee, who actually becomes violent as he tries to walk home in the midst of horrendous traffic in Falling Down. Fortunately most of us do not allow our anger to escalate into violent outbursts, but the fact remains that many of us experience a level of anger that chronically interferes with work in the Guard and personal relationships, actually damaging long term physical and psychological health.

Anger is a natural human emotion, and sometimes can be used appropriately. But a constant feeling of anger often leads to significant problems and multiple symptoms, including depression, headaches, insomnia, interpersonal stress, poor performance at work, lack of concentration, memory loss, excessive use of alcohol, family conflicts, and indeed many other potential consequences.

Anger leads to **“dis-ease,”** and for some people, causes a lifetime of hassles, unmanageable stress, and feelings of being victimized. Some psychologists now believe that the level of anger in our society (for example, the “road rage” which we have all experienced!!) is higher than in previous times because we are unable to balance our lives better, and are too often experiencing an unhealthy competitiveness. No matter how you view it, anger comprises complex human feelings that involve our body, our thoughts and our behaviors.

Understanding anger and all its causes requires some study, perhaps some reading and even some counseling with an outside, neutral person.

The fact that you clicked this link, and are reading this at this very moment, is very positive because it implies that you have passed the first step in “anger management,” namely the willingness to take responsibility for your emotions. Congratulations, you are ahead of 99% of the people who inhabit the earth who generally prefer to blame everything and everyone for their anger and aggressive behaviors. Effective anger management begins with you and your psychological self. Controlling anger can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) methods for managing anger in yourself and (2) learning to respond effectively to anger and hostility in others.

Here are some suggestions and tips that you might want to consider as you convert anger into something more positive, healthier, and ultimately better for people who work with you in the **National Guard** and live with you on daily basis.

Anger Management Tips

Tip 1: Try to accept the notion that anger is usually triggered by an event but then is “fueled” by your own thoughts and interpretations of that event. After the event our thoughts act on the reality, increase the intensity of our response, and then often stimulate blame and in some rare situations, actual physical aggression or violence. **To manage anger over the long term, you must accept the fact that your own thoughts are at the heart of the anger cycle.** This will give you an immediate sense of control.

Tip 2: Very few people can alter a lifetime of anger unless they see the very real connection between how they think and the resulting impact on emotions and behaviors. Emotions do not cause negative thoughts. Negative thinking sets in motion emotional patterns such as anger. For example, if you insist on believing that the world is unfair, or that other people are “always” taking advantage of you, then an anger response will be inevitable. It is essential that you review your beliefs. **Are these beliefs “harmful to your health” and the well-being of those around you at work or at home?**

Tip 3: Remember that the same event can be seen differently. **You often have a choice** of viewing a situation differently, and this simple SHIFT in perspective might, for example, turn anger and interpersonal hostility into sadness, mild annoyance, or even empathy for the person who supposedly “made you angry.” These emotions are less destructive than anger.

Tip 4: Make sure you are aware of some of the **thought patterns** which cause many of us to experience destructive levels of anger. Here are some that can lead to an increase in your anger on a daily basis: (1) I must be perfect all the time; (2) I must please everyone around me; (3) I have to control everything and everyone; (4) I can’t say things that might hurt someone’s feelings; and (5) Life is unfair. Break the habit of believing these messages by becoming aware of how often they are part of your life. **Listen to your own thinking!**

Tip 5: Depression and anger are close relatives! If you are constantly angry with life and people, then try to examine your level of sadness, unhappiness or sense of worthiness as a person. It may be painful to look at these emotions, but they are less destructive and can be modified through counseling. **Give us a call!!**

Tip 6: Try to express your emotions or feelings without “losing it.” In other words, verbalize what you are experiencing but don’t get caught in the cycle of escalating hostility, blaming others and aggressive put-downs. This takes practice but we guarantee that friends, fellow guardsman and guardswomen, and family member, will respond to your needs quicker and with more caring. **Remember to use the word “I” as opposed to “You” when expressing feelings** (for example: “I was feeling very hurt by what you said in the meeting” versus “You once again made me feel angry!”).

Tip 7: Evaluate the past and determine if your anger is maintained by “past hurts”. The past does not have to control your present life, but in order to reduce its influence you must first become aware of its impact. As part of this exercise, learn what typically provokes your anger response. Is there a common pattern or a type of person? Does this person remind you of anyone else from your past?

Tip 8: Many people at the **Guard** who tell us that anger has “controlled” their lives also reveal that they do not believe that their needs are met. When we interview these people it has been our impression that they are not keenly aware of which needs are high or low. Set aside some time to conduct a “needs assessment”. Which things do you need or want more than others, and how are you going about seeking satisfaction? **Chronic anger may be a symptom in someone who has a high need for something which remains unsatisfied.**

Tip 9: There are a number of behaviors that we all have used that can increase in anger or hostility. These behaviors occur most frequently when we are in relationships with others, at work or at home. **Which among the following tend to appear in your daily life?**

- ✓ (1) Always blaming others when things go wrong;
- ✓ (2) Never accepting criticism or feedback gracefully;
- ✓ (3) Labeling other people quickly;
- ✓ (4) Complaining about everything and becoming pessimistic about life;
- ✓ (5) Yelling in loud tones; and
- ✓ (6) Always arguing when others have a different opinion or outlook.

For further assistance our coaches are available to speak with you privately, confidentially and at no charge as part of the **Guard Your Buddy Program**. We can be reached 24/7 at 855 HELP GYB (855-435-7492).