

Dealing With Anger: Part 1

Let's discuss something that many people, almost all people, deal with on a regular basis. I'm talking about anger. Let's learn what causes anger, how to be angry and not act inappropriately, and then learn how not to get angry nearly as often and instead minimize your anger. Learning about anger is one of the things that was the most life-changing for me.

This topic will connect how the hippocampus (that we have talked about before) might be tied to our core beliefs (that we've talked about before) and how those core beliefs are tied to how we think. This is a subject of special interest to any of us who might get angry often.

Let me ask you a question: When people get angry, how do you normally respond? When someone comes at us with anger, most of us respond with more anger. Then they respond with anger and then we respond with anger and, before we know it, there's a full-blown argument. My question is, how's that working for you? If that's happening to you, is that working?

Understanding Anger

Here's a key to handling anger. Understanding what causes anger and what physically happens to our bodies when we become angry can help us develop a new thought that can change the angry feeling. Knowing those things is important as we learn what causes us to get angry. There are three root causes of anger: fear, frustration and pain. That pain can be physical or emotional. So if any of those three things happen, we can become angry.

When we become angry, here's what happens. Adrenaline is released in our bodies called epinephrine or norepinephrine. We don't need to go into the details here of their differences but when either one of those adrenals is released, it causes us to go into fight-or-flight mode. I'm sure you may

have heard about this before. When we go into fight-or-flight mode, the rational part of our brains actually reduce and we think more with the emotional part of our brains.

Have you ever said, after you got angry, "I can't believe I said that" or "I can't believe I did that. What was I thinking!" Well, now you know the truth. The truth is you weren't thinking.

So what would happen if we could start changing the thought if we experienced fear, frustration or pain to a different thought, such as, "There's always one more thing about that person's life that I know nothing about"? Or, "They may have some hippocampus issues that's causing them to be angry and their reaction may have nothing to do with what I just did or said." Or, "Thank goodness they care enough about me to bring this issue to me in a way that I can hear it." If I can think that way when people are angry with me, it keeps the epinephrine from releasing.

However, if the epinephrine does release, I know the best thing I can do is just go silent, don't respond and don't fight back and don't run away. Don't go into the fight-or-flight mode. Don't do either one. Let the epinephrine run its course. Once the epinephrine runs its course, you can calmly deal with the anger and talk through the issue. Then you can calmly deal with the anger for both of you. That way, their epinephrine is gone. Your epinephrine is gone and you can talk through what actually happened that caused the anger. When we can do that, our relationships improve dramatically and that's what we want to happen. If our relationships can improve, we can shift the culture of any organization. And remember that our definition of an organization is any time two or more people are in relationship.

As I really understood how anger was connected to my thoughts, feelings and actions (TFA), what I started realizing is that I have control over these things. I started asking myself if I

am going to take responsibility for my thoughts or if I am going to blame other people. Let me give you an example: What happens when I look at my two-year-old daughter and tell her she caused me to be angry? She's going to be seventeen years old one day and she's going to keep doing those same things because she now knows she can control my life. What happens if I look at a co-worker or a friend or a spouse and I say, "You make me so angry. You caused me to be angry"?

When we really think about it, that sounds pretty silly. What I'm really saying is that I give you complete control over my life. It just doesn't make logical sense. As long as we allow anger to take over, our words and actions won't make sense because when the epinephrine kicks in, the rational part of our brains diminish.

What Causes You to Get Angry?

Would you do a short exercise with me? I'd like to ask you to pause and think about what makes you angry. Think about what pushes your button. What happens that causes the epinephrine to release? Is it when your children don't do what you ask them to do? Is it when your employees underperform? Is it when your computer doesn't work well? What is it that pushes your button? Take time to do this short exercise and write down answers to these three questions.

1. What makes you angry? What are the things that cause your epinephrine to release?
2. What is the thought that comes with each situation that causes you to become angry?
3. What could your new thought be the next time that event takes place?

Now, I'd like for you to practice something. Just as we lift weights to build up our muscles, start thinking that new thought. If you think that new thought now, then when the

situation happens that causes you to get angry, you'll be able to capture that new thought because you have practiced and built up that new-thought muscle. Write that new thought on some Post-It notes so you will be sure to see it multiple times a day, or put it in your smartphone on your calendar so it pops up and you can practice the new thought.

If you wait until the anger-causing situation happens to come up with your new thought, it's too late then because once the epinephrine is released, the rational part of the brain is reduced and now you can't think clearly. Watch what happens if this new thought is the first thought the next time that event takes place. You and those around you will be pleased at the change in your behavior.

A Personal Anger Example

The Fight Story—Reaching for a Gun

Now, let me share with you some of the anger issues in my life and how they affected me compared to not having those anger issues now. I'll call this story the Fight Story. The epinephrine kicked in and I wanted to fight. You have to turn the clock back a lot of years. My wife and I can't remember whether we were dating or engaged but we were pulling out of a parking lot in Texas from a Skaggs-Albertson store. I had a brand-new Ford Mustang car that I had bought myself for graduation. In case you don't know, that was *the* pace car and I thought I was the guy!

As we were pulling out of this parking lot, another car pulled in front of me to try to beat me out of the parking lot. Having anger and road rage, and the faster car, I zoomed around in front of them. As I went around them, I waved with both hands in the air but with only one finger as I drove away with my knee. Well, think for a moment what I did for their epinephrine. I got to the exit before they did and I took a right turn out of the exit. As I pulled up to the red light

that allowed turning into the Texas A & M University campus or left or right, the traffic was heavy. All the lights were red and I had stopped.

As I looked into my rearview mirror, two guys were getting out of their car walking up beside our car and they each had a knife in their hand. Well, that's not a problem when you live in Texas. It was very simple. I bent over to reach under my seat because you don't bring a knife to a gunfight. As I reached down for that gun, my wife reached over and grabbed my arm and she said, "No!" When she said that, I looked up. I ran the red light and ran like a chicken.

What I know today is if my wife hadn't been calm, there's a good chance that I might be teaching Transformational Leadership in the Texas penitentiary system today. How silly would that have been to shoot someone over who got out of the parking lot first. But that's what anger can cause us to do.

Deciding What Kind of Leader You Want to Be

This is what we're talking about when we talk about becoming a transformational leader. We are trying to become something that's very different from who we are to becoming something better and embracing the metamorphosis that takes place during that transformation. As we keep moving forward in this process, let's continue talking together about what might cause us to keep from being that kind of leader and what we can learn about the tools that will help us overcome what holds us back. {eo}

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