

# Get Angry, Not Stupid

*Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.*

—Aristotle

## Our Promise

This chapter will show you how to use negative emotions such as anger to drive healthy and productive outcomes. Much of what you've learned about emotional intelligence is wrong. It's been taught incorrectly over the last thirty years, and emotional intelligence “experts” (ourselves included) have been part of the problem. This teaching has been based on the misconception that negative emotions are bad, interfere with rational thinking, and should be avoided or suppressed. Our goal in this chapter is to correct that misconception.

Everyone has heard that people should suppress or even completely avoid feelings such as anger and frustration in the workplace. However, we have observed our clients achieve outstanding business results doing what may seem counterintuitive.

We will show you how to be authentically angry or frustrated and to do it without leaving dead bodies in your wake or being labeled a jerk. Used intelligently, these feelings can actually build relationships.

We will also show you how to help others leverage negative emotion and how to help a group find the mood most appropriate for tackling the task in front of it.

## Recognize the Moment

A team that led the regional division of a global company was responsible for hitting an annual forecast budget. In the middle of one particular year, the global office removed significant resources but left objectives unchanged, sending the message, “You still have to accomplish all these goals with only 70 percent of the resources promised. Don’t whine about it. Get the job done.”

There was a lot of anger and discussion about the unfairness of the global office’s action. In a situation like this, fraught with negative emotion, we hope to see somebody on the team recognize a leadership moment and say, “You know what, folks? The reality now is that we have 70 percent of the budget we were promised, and it is OK to be angry. I’m angry, too. Now—how are we going to turn this anger around and use all this energy to achieve our very aggressive goal with 30 percent less budget?”

Think back and identify a time when you’ve felt angry at being unfairly treated. How did you and your colleagues react?

Taking advantage of such a moment requires two things:

- The awareness of one’s own negative emotions and the ability to make productive use of them
- The skill to help others do the same

## Thinking and Feeling

We used to make it our goal to drive bad moods and negative emotions *out* of organizations. Our old approach would have been to try to suppress or ignore that team's anger. We did the same in our own professional and personal lives, because we mistakenly believed that this was the right thing to do.

We have since changed our stance. We now know that people can leverage their “afflictive emotions”—those that make them feel bad, such as anger, greed, hate, guilt, or longing—to drive outstanding results. Nowadays, we have a better idea of how people's emotions influence what and how they think. We live in an age that places a high value on thinking. We all are often told, especially in Western societies, to avoid being “carried away” by our emotions, advice based on the flawed presumption that emotions interfere with rational thinking.

Few of us truly understand the link between how we are feeling and what we are thinking. Most of us operate on the principle that thinking would be better, clearer, and more efficient if we kept our feelings out of it. However, as neuroscientists have been saying for years, and management scientists are now beginning to realize, our thinking is completely bound up with our feelings. In fact, rather than seeing ourselves as thinking machines that have feelings, it would be more accurate to say that we are feeling machines that are capable of thought.

Think about a time when you purchased something that you knew was overpriced or that you could not really afford, only to regret it later. This is a clear example of how we sometimes feel first and think second.

These two understandings—that we can leverage afflictive emotions and that thinking and feeling are bound together—have important consequences for certain moments in which you might exercise leadership, moments such as the one described

in the tale of the leadership team whose resources were suddenly cut.

### The Anatomy of Anger

Anger is a good example of an afflictive emotion that is highly leverageable. Consider anger as a fuel that you can use to generate the energy required to move to productive action. Although a lot has been written about the power of positive emotion, all emotions—both positive and negative—have uses. Positive emotions are clearly more pleasurable, but that should not blind you to the fact that you can leverage your negative emotions to produce positive outcomes.

We had a client who was using anger unproductively to deal with her boss. Our client, the president of an industry-leading software division of a larger company, worked for a CEO whom she admired and also struggled with. She complained that he would go “skip level” and give direction to her employees, sometimes in a way that she felt contradicted a prior agreement. Another issue was that she felt as though she had to answer to an intermediary between her and the CEO, and that this individual was operating with a different belief system from her own and who simply did not add value. Her anger robbed her of the enjoyment she should have taken from her work and distracted her from bringing her full potential to bear on the challenges she faced.

Our client let her frustration over one or both of these perceived obstacles build up over time. Although she exceeded all metric-driven goals, she would sometimes “blow up” in meetings with the CEO and speak in a way that he found to be unproductive and annoying.

While coaching her, we helped her identify that both of her perceived frustrations had a connecting theme. She felt frustrated at being micromanaged or didn’t have adequate

autonomy for her role (or both). We helped her figure out that she needed to have a higher-level discussion with the CEO that centered on discussing how much autonomy she should have. She avoided discussing the intermediary's perceived incompetence or her CEO's skip-level tendencies. Instead of using her anger to complain, she started to use it to challenge the paradigm and to ask for a level of autonomy and respect that was commensurate with her role.

She was ultimately successful on both fronts. Her approach to the CEO was to say, "I'm interested in finding out if, as president of this division, I have the autonomy to make a financial decision of this size—even if it isn't what you would do if you were president of my division."

She managed to carefully redirect her energy, using it as fuel to deal with these redundant annoyances on a higher level.

Colm learned this lesson as a young martial artist—a national champion at underage level. Yet there was one fighter whom Colm had never beaten—the senior champion. In the gym at the back of Colm's house, he hung an article about the senior champion. Whenever he felt like quitting on the last set of reps, he focused on the picture of his rival, and the anger surge he felt gave him the fuel to push through. Anger may be a dangerous emotion to feel during a contest, but it is a very good emotion to feel during training.

A client of ours has used this technique to enhance the quality assurance level of his company's proposals. They had recently lost a competitive bid to a rival that had previously been below their capability—both on financial and technical criteria. The prospect's rejection letter incited a great deal of anger and soul searching in our client's leadership team. The leader skillfully used the anger that this rejection caused to focus attention on what the team would do to never let that happen again. When they're confident that they have produced a great

bid on a new proposal, the leader reminds them of how angry they were when they lost to their new rival. He uses this anger to challenge them and inspire them to take their work to the next level. Just as in Colm's case, anger is not a good emotion to carry into a bid meeting, but it certainly helps during the long, dark nights of preparation leading up to that moment.

We see another great example of this in the case of Reddit, a web search company that was sold to Condé Nast eighteen months after it was founded. Although this seems like a fairy tale "rags to riches" story for the founders (University of Virginia students Alexis Ohanian and Steve Huffman), there were some real setbacks. One in particular shows how anger can be a useful fuel for business success.

While trying to get their project off the ground, Ohanian and Huffman were called to meet a Yahoo executive who was interested in their project. When the Yahoo executive heard that Reddit had only a few thousand users, he scoffed, "You're a rounding error compared to Yahoo."

Ohanian returned home and wrote, on the wall beside his desk, "You are a rounding error." Ohanian used that comment to recall the anger he felt at being dismissed, causing two things to happen. First, he was convinced that he was not a rounding error and that his business model was sound. His anger made him sure that he was right. Second, he used the energy his anger gave him to set out to prove the Yahoo guy wrong. Ohanian said, "That simple sentence of rejection fueled us."<sup>1</sup>

Think about a time when you have suffered a setback or a rejection of some kind. Rejection can be one of the hardest emotions to contend with. Did you dwell on the anger and humiliation? Did you plot all sorts of horrible acts of revenge against the person who rejected your idea or who you thought caused your failure? Did you waste precious time cursing your fate? Imagine how much better it would have been if you had

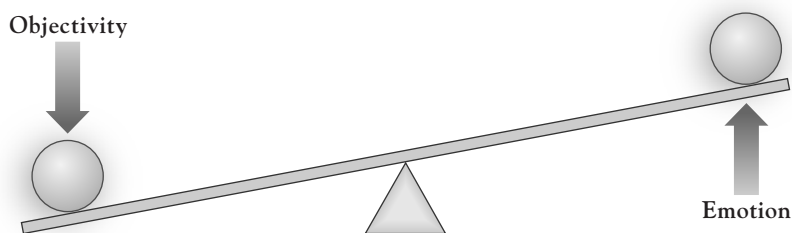
channeled that anger into productive uses like those we've described here.

If you don't have a colleague who can help you leverage the energy of a bad mood or bad memory to be productive, you can use certain techniques on your own. We will show you some of those later in this chapter, but to use these tools most effectively, you need to understand what is going on inside you as anger builds.

We recognize that the distinctions among the three layers of the brain have received much attention in other books. However, because these distinctions are crucial to understanding how to use anger productively, we'll outline them here. The brain consists of these layers:

- The **reptilian brain** deals with the very basic functions, such as eating and sleeping.
- The **limbic system and hippocampus** handle the processing of emotions and the formation of memory, which are inextricably linked. Within the limbic system is a gland called the amygdala that watches for danger.
- The **neocortex** handles all of the sophisticated processing, such as that required for abstract thought, language, and mathematics. Signals are passed from your limbic system to your neocortex, where you "make sense" of the information you receive from your environment. So all the thoughts you have are colored by your emotions, and the way you feel at any point has a direct influence on the thoughts you generate.

As a result of this structure, your emotional system can sometimes take precedence over your thinking system.<sup>2</sup> We can all point to instances where perfectly obvious and rational decisions were ignored based on how people felt. You can



**Figure 1.1 The Seesaw of Emotion vs. Objectivity**

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probably recall a time when you felt so angry that you couldn't speak. Your amygdala was exciting a fight response, draining energy from your language center.

The problem for most people is not that they get angry; it's that they *become less intelligent* when they do. Our beef is with stupidity, not anger. So we don't want you to stop getting angry, as that would rob you of emotional fuel that you sometimes need to succeed. We simply want you to be *intelligent while angry*.

Figure 1.1 graphically represents how poorly managed emotion causes people to lose the ability to think objectively.

### Be Angry with the Right Person

The quotation from Aristotle at the start of this chapter advises us of the importance of being angry with the right person. One predominant way that people deal with their anger is by taking that anger out on someone other than the source of their anger.

We worked with one very controlling senior executive who felt a need to manage every aspect of her environment, including her people and her strategy. She was dealing with a difficult stakeholder issue and was frustrated that one important group was refusing to engage in a productive way. However, the power



dynamics of the situation prevented her from expressing her anger to those people, and she'd not yet learned to deal with her anger effectively.

She found herself becoming increasingly impatient and intolerant of her staff's mistakes. Once she developed more self-awareness and recognized her need for control, she was able to identify and accept how angry the reluctant stakeholder was making her. She then realized that she was carrying that anger around with her all the time—a low-grade mood of irritation that was merely anger waiting to be released. Sure enough, she would react in an impatient and frustrated way when one of her staff made a mistake. She experienced her breakthrough moment when she connected her impatience with her employee to her unresolved anger with the stakeholder who would not engage.

This client now recognizes that impatience with a staffer's mistake may signal a pivotal moment for her. She uses this simple awareness to handle her reactions. Now, when she feels as though someone isn't "coming through" for her, she understands that she is capable of thinking intelligently and brings herself in check prior to opening her mouth and actually speaking.

Take a moment now to think about people or situations in your work life that habitually cause you to become angry (or irritated or frustrated). Try to ignore the feelings you have toward the situation and ask yourself what it is that you are really angry about. Explore the possibility that the person or situation that is making you angry is a lightning rod for a real cause somewhere else in your life. What might that real cause be?

## Step Up

The key to developing your ability to remain intelligent, even as your blood begins to boil, is to recognize that anger is not a binary, "either-or" emotion. That is, there are many levels of

anger. At the mildest, you are slightly irritated, and then you become frustrated. If the situation persists, you become angry; and if the emotion continues to build, you may become enraged. To learn to remain intelligent while angry, you must start small—that is, learn to retain your thinking ability when you are merely irritated and then move on to frustration and so on.

### Respond . . . Don't React

Our goal is to have you *respond* rather than *react*. A reaction is a somewhat thoughtless and sudden event, usually involving you saying or doing something you will later regret. A response comprises the behaviors and actions you thoughtfully planned to demonstrate when and if you were ever in a particular situation. Although there are rare situations when it is appropriate and perhaps even helpful to demonstrate negative emotion, we will first look at how to control your impulses during common and only mildly threatening situations.

The first step is to identify your “triggers”: the types of people and situations that lead you into a highly charged emotional state. Some people get angry when they believe they are being lied to. Some have a negative emotional response when they perceive an injustice, such as racial discrimination or a large person picking on a smaller person. The members of the team whose budget was cut believed that they were being treated unfairly. The executive who was feeling as if her team wasn’t coming through for her was misplacing her anger at her inability to control her situation. Those are the kinds of situations that decrease your intellectual and rational capacity. When was the last time you acted in anger and said (or did) something that you later regretted? Think about that situation now. Doing so will help you identify your triggers.

Ask yourself right now:

- *What type of behavior in others tends to make me feel upset?* Maybe a coworker who is always late on projects and always makes excuses bothers you. Or perhaps you're frustrated by people who "don't come through" or "lack accountability."
- *What types of situations tend to make me feel upset?* If you tend to get upset when stuck in traffic or when you have a delayed flight, you may be frustrated or angry when you can't control a situation.

After you have identified your personal triggers, you are equipped to do something about the anger that results. (Later we'll talk about the specific tactics you can use to manage your emotions.) For example, one of Henry's triggers is being lied to. The old Henry would feel anger and speak from that anger in a way that he would later regret. If you ever hear Henry give a keynote address, you are likely to hear him openly discuss mistakes he made while feeling very angry.

Perhaps you've had these moments too, when you say something that makes you feel better in the moment, but, in hindsight, leads you to think, "I could have done better than that." The new and improved Henry still feels angry when he perceives that he is being lied to. However, with good coaching, mentoring, practice, and study, he has developed methods for responding in a way that he can be proud of. Please note that although he has done a lot of introspective work to build the New Henry, Old Henry is alive and well and living in a bungalow in New Henry's backyard. When the weather isn't to Old Henry's liking, he comes out of the bungalow banging a pot and demanding immediate recognition.

Once you recognize that you are genuinely irritated with a person or situation yet can still be processing intellectually at

a high level, you can move on to situations in which you experience frustration, then anger, and rage. Negative emotions can be very useful to you if you know how to manage them. However, they can be quite destructive if used unwisely—so we urge you to be careful and thoughtful about how and when you leverage these feelings.

### Leaping to Judgment

You no doubt occasionally endure negative emotions when you are interacting with people whose beliefs differ from yours. While coaching, we often hear clients refer to someone else as “stupid.” We ask that when faced with a divergent opinion, you don’t judge the *entire human being* you’re interacting with as ignorant, stupid, or evil. We have four reasons for this request: First, these people can sense how you are feeling about them. Second, they are probably more complex as human beings than that single opinion illustrates. Third, it is within the realm of possibility that you are misunderstanding them. Fourth, they might offer you information or a perspective that you are currently lacking.

You certainly don’t have to agree with ideas or ideologies that don’t appeal to you. But an emotionally intelligent way to manage these situations is to replace your leap to judgment with *curiosity*—a desire to find out why this person thinks the way he or she does. Judgment kills relationships; curiosity builds them.

Imagine, for example, that you’ve met someone who supports a political candidate you do not approve of. Instead of leaping to what might be a natural response—“That’s crazy. You’re wrong”—you might instead say, “I don’t understand how you could think that your candidate is better than mine, and I want to. What is it about your candidate’s policies, background, or agenda that impresses you? What do

you think your candidate can do for the country that my candidate can't?"

In an interview with Henry about high-performing teams and leadership, former fighter pilot and two-time astronaut Sid Gutierrez eloquently expressed an idea that we endorse. Part of Henry's preparation for this interview was to ask his Facebook friends, "What would you ask an astronaut if you had the chance?" Sid agreed to answer some of those questions and asked, "Is the first question about aliens?" Henry said, "Yes it is!" They both smiled, and Henry asked, "While in space, have you ever seen anything that you could not explain?"

Sid leaned in and said, "No; but I think that most people in the world would fit into one of two primary categories on the subject of aliens. The first group claims to have had direct encounters with aliens through sightings, abductions, and so forth. The second group thinks that the first group is crazy or stupid. I'm in a third category, which I believe to be a minority: that there might be an entire world of knowledge that we don't have at this point in our understanding as a species. People may have witnessed or seen things that cannot be explained or categorized because they could fall under the category of a realm that we cannot and do not even begin to understand. In the end, I believe that there might be plenty I don't know. I try to remain open to that possibility when I meet people with different opinions from my own."

Sid reiterates our underlying point: people cannot be defined *exclusively* by one opinion. Therefore, we must remain open to other possibilities beyond our current level of understanding.

Imagine someone in a business setting offering a course of action that you don't like: "I think we should liquidate the parts division and focus instead on selling complete systems through dedicated retail stores." Rather than leaping to judgment of their proposal, you might ask a question such as, "I don't see

how selling high-end systems in a down economy will help secure our future over the next few years. I am interested in hearing more about how you think it will.”

Suppose that the other person is getting angry during this confrontation. What if you were to take a moment to contemplate how that person feels? Is he or she angry or feeling threatened? Do you know what it is like to feel that same way? Can you find compassion—and how do compassion and understanding feel on a physical level? Do you feel better already? Lighter? Breathing more easily? If so, then that is the energy you will project during this confrontation—which will make you much more likely to have a positive effect on the other person’s emotional state as well. One of Henry’s favorite proverbs is, “Hating someone is like swallowing poison and waiting for that other person to become sick.”

## Managing Your Emotions

The feelings you experience are preceded by physiological changes in your body. Afflictive emotions might make your chest and jaw tight, your breathing shallow, your hands clench into fists, and your shoulders tense. In other words, your body always gives you a heads up that you are about to realize a feeling. Becoming angry is your body giving you a sign that you are about to go primal. When you sense that this process is beginning, use the following techniques to help you stay intelligent.

### *Breathing*

Deep, controlled breaths help restore blood flow and stop the production of the chemicals that cause you to react suddenly and with great force. Sometimes it is hard to take a deep breath when upset. In those moments, try breathing *out*. Do it now.

Breathe all the air out through your mouth, and you will notice that you cannot help but take a deep breath in.

Of course, breathing out through your mouth may work well while sitting alone and reading this book. It may not work quite as well when sitting at a meeting or a dinner table surrounded by other people who are looking at you. So try an alternative for those situations. Slowly push the air out of your lungs through your nose. Again, you will notice that you can't help but breathe in afterwards. Really, try it now. We promise you will have more oxygen available to you after you breathe out.

### *Questioning*

When you ask your brain a question—any question—it forces blood back into the neocortex where intelligent thought occurs. Your body stops producing the “bad” chemicals and restores your ability to think and act more rationally. So ask yourself a question when you are triggered—and start simple: *What did I eat for breakfast yesterday? What is the last good movie I saw? What time did I wake up yesterday?*

Although any question will produce the desired result of a calmer emotional state and more rational thinking, you can ask more sophisticated questions appropriate to the situation at hand as you progress in this practice. *What can I say to make this other person feel safe right now? What am I really trying to accomplish in this situation? What can I say or do to build this relationship?*

### *Palms Up*

You may notice that when you are triggered, you put your palms down or cross your arms. Uncross your arms and focus on keeping your palms in an open and up position, even if you are on the phone.

*Time-Out*

Sometimes all the techniques and leadership approaches in the world aren't going to help because you're simply too stressed. In these moments, we suggest that you politely exit the situation. Admit your own feelings to yourself and, without blaming the other party, remove yourself until you can find balance. You might explain, "I know I'm not capable of discussing this rationally right now, and I request that we revisit it tomorrow."



Managing your emotions in the moment is not always easy. It requires practicing these techniques when you're *not* in such moments so that they are readily available to you when you are. Anger will probably require the most practice. Also bear in mind that you leave yourself open to being hijacked if you are someone who cannot handle negative emotion. That is, it's easier for others to put you in a negative mood—and at a disadvantage. Certain people are good at spotting your triggers and can use them against you if you are not able to leverage your negative emotion.

Plan for the times that you expect to be irritated, and rehearse the responses we have suggested. Remember that your body will give you a heads up. If you are aware of what is happening in your body, you can interrupt the cycle, stay at the stage in which you are simply irritated, and not let the emotion get out of hand.

When you are in control, you are able to observe and appropriately control your own behavior, either allowing the anger to build or dampening your response. Psychologist Maureen Gaffney explains this as the difference between saying "I am angry" and saying "I have the experience of being angry" or,



more simply put, “I am feeling angry.” In this way, you are asserting that your emotion is not the whole of you.<sup>3</sup>

### Leveraging Anger

Anger is a potentially toxic emotion. The techniques we described will help you get in control of it and remain intelligent. However, the point is not to calm down but to hold on to the high-energy state that you are in, recognize that it can be useful, and direct it toward something productive. Redirect your anger into constructive activity. When you are in control, you are able to respond appropriately.

One example of doing this involves an employee who was putting her job in jeopardy. She was consistently late for meetings and dismissive of the subject matter during the meetings because, as she explained, “I don’t give a damn about this topic. It doesn’t affect me and I’m already overworked, so why should I take my time to go into this meeting full of people I’m not connected to and deal with their crap?”

This employee’s supervisor saw that she was missing the connections between her work and others’—specifically, that they shared some financial incentives. The supervisor also wanted to repair the very low level of trust on the team, which required the employee’s presence.

The supervisor was coached to leverage his justifiable anger about the employee’s behavior and attitude. He told her, “I am very frustrated and angry that I am going to have to fire you in thirty days if your behavior does not change. Picture us sitting down in this room in thirty days, both really upset and frustrated that we failed because you have not been willing to show up to these meetings on time.” Ultimately, the employee did not improve her attitude or behavior and was released by the company. She felt that she had been treated fairly, for the most part, and the supervisor gained a lot of credibility with the rest

of the team for resolving what was perceived to have been an “old problem.”

A second example of using anger productively involves the CFO of a financial institution who first had to stop *suppressing* his anger. One of his employees had a child sick with leukemia; she sometimes didn’t come to work and often left early. When she was there, she didn’t do a whole lot of work, and the rest of the team was running around her and beginning to miss their targets. They could not afford to carry a passenger, but they were all trying to do just that.

When the CFO thought about the problem, he allowed himself to feel only compassionate toward the woman; he had never allowed himself to be angry. As we worked with him, he began to let this happen. He never expressed his anger to her, but did allow it to rise without feeling guilty about it. Then he started to see the reality of the situation: that she was incapable of ever coming back to work and that his team couldn’t continue to work the way they were. He had to have an honest conversation with her about her role on the team.

Acknowledging his anger allowed him to reach beyond his compassion, stop seeing himself as a bad guy, and offer her a different role in the organization. It turned out that she did not *want* a full-time, all-day, five- or six-days-a-week job. She was actually happy and relieved that somebody had the guts to treat her as a grown-up and not tiptoe around the issue of her child’s illness, and preferred to work part-time so that she could care for her child.

When the CFO kept his anger buried and allowed himself to feel only compassion, he saw only one set of solutions. When he *did* get angry, he saw a different set of solutions. And once he gained control of his anger, he still had the ideas that came to him in his angry state. The anger-induced ideas weren’t necessarily better, but using both compassion and anger gave him more options.

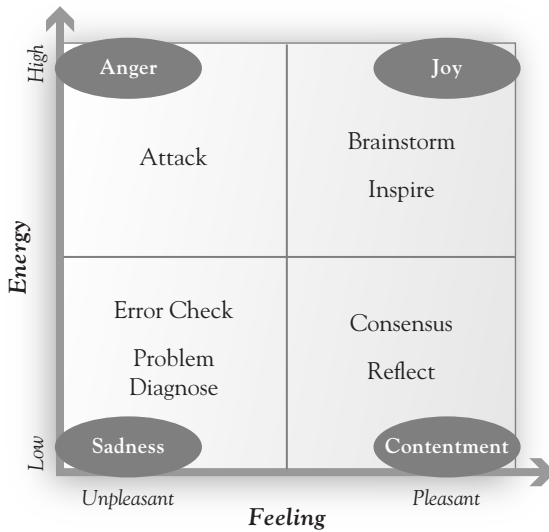
Although it is important to be able to use the energy your anger produces, many leadership moments show up as opportunities to **challenge others** to make a choice about what *they* are going to do in a heightened state of negative emotion. You do need to be able to be angry yourself so that you are comfortable with that emotion. This way, you do not freak out, shrink, or run away when other people are angry in your presence. You can help them redirect it when you have developed some skill at recognizing and dealing with your own emotions by practicing the techniques described earlier in this chapter. If you have done that, you will immediately recognize the opportunity to lead when you see anger in people around you—and you can become a catalyst for positive action.

### Supermarket Sensitivity

Leadership moments often show up when you are working in a group—and you can take those opportunities whether you are the formal leader or simply a member. To do so, it helps to understand how various emotions influence groups as they work on specific tasks.

David Caruso, a leading researcher in emotional intelligence, has developed a useful way of looking at people's various emotions in a group setting, and how they can use them for the tasks that groups perform (see Figure 1.2).

Sometimes you want people angry in order to drive the best business result. You may also wish to catalyze a spectrum of emotions, focusing on certain ones during particular stages of a process or project. For example, imagine that you're facilitating a decision-making meeting. Ideally, everyone will be in the top right-hand quadrant (Figure 1.2) at the start, feeling high-energy and positive. In this mood, people are open to possibilities, and they readily see opportunities and generate lots of ideas. Once they've voiced these ideas, they will then need to organize them and agree on priorities. The bottom right-hand



**Figure 1.2 Mood and Cognition Model**

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quadrant is the most appropriate mood for this phase. People remain positive, but the energy level drops as they reflect on their work and move toward a consensus.

Next they need to assess the risks involved in their decisions, asking such questions as, “Have we picked our best ideas?” “What might go wrong?” and “What contingencies do we need to plan for?” The bottom left-hand quadrant of the Mood and Cognition model is now the optimal mood, as this is where the emotional brain is warning of danger out there—and telling you to tread carefully and wisely.

Finally, it comes time to stop the analysis phase of the decision-making process and generate the energy and confidence to move to action. This is a leadership moment in which someone might step up and say something like, “Everyone

knows we are at very high risk if we don't make the right choice here, so let's focus."

Perhaps more than any other emotion, anger creates an urge to move and will propel the group to take action.<sup>4</sup> It also narrows the group's focus and increases its confidence. When the group is ready to execute its plan, anger will help to end any further search for solutions and prevent paralysis by analysis.

Remember: anger isn't necessarily a useful emotion in which to *develop* plans. But once you have a plan, you can use anger in an emotionally intelligent way to implement it.

There is an **optimal mood for every task** that a group might undertake. Knowing this provides you with leadership opportunities, in that you can help *create the mood*. Doing so requires that you become sensitive to the moods of those around you and develop your own repertoire of things that you might do or say to affect those moods.

It can be a challenge to perceive others' moods; however, it's usually easier than we think. Imagine that you're in line at a supermarket behind just one or two people. You are close enough to see the conveyor and other people's groceries, but you haven't been able to put your own purchases down yet. Can you tell what mood the cashier is in, even though he or she is not speaking to you yet? Are you able to determine what kind of day that cashier is having? Can you tell by the shape of the cashier's mouth, the look in the eyes, the posture, and the tone of voice? People around you are giving you the gift of clues to how they are feeling in the moment. You just need to be tuned in to them. In fact, dogs are excellent at reading human facial expressions, and some research indicates that when you are reprimanding a dog, it is not your voice but your facial expression that it is primarily responding to. (You probably know someone who is not as evolved as a dog, but that is a subject for an entirely different book.)

Almost everyone says yes to our questions about the supermarket checker; almost everyone is able to sense others' moods. So why are they so apt to miss the moods of people they work with every day when they are with them in a meeting? Is it because they are a little more relaxed in a supermarket check-out line where there is not much at stake? Or is it simply that they are blind to the importance and role of others' emotions in a professional setting? You must also be aware that *you yourself* are the cashier; others can see how you are really feeling when you are interacting with them, so you might as well leverage those feelings. If you can enter a meeting in a more relaxed state, you can then gauge how other people are feeling. Being sensitive to others' moods is simply a matter of being relaxed—that is, less self-conscious—and deciding to pay attention to them.

### In Position to Lead

Armed with awareness of a group's mood and tasks, you are in position to lead in one of two ways. First, you can **leverage the existing mood** by introducing a task that meets that type of mood. Imagine that you are with a group that has recently experienced a failure, just like the client we discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Your group has worked for some months to retain a reluctant client who eventually left. Now another opportunity is on the horizon, but everyone is still suffering emotionally from the loss. This is a great time to diagnose why you lost the client. You can make optimum use of the unpleasant mood and low energy by saying something to the group like, "Hey guys—this really sucks, and I'm as upset about it as you are. But *how* did we lose this client? What exactly did we do—or fail to do?" We all know that Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. By asking questions like these,

you challenge the group to acknowledge behaviors or business practices that create self-inflicted pain, and, well, knowledge is power. Now you have something to work on.

Another one of our clients provided a second example of introducing a task to leverage a mood. On Friday afternoons, after about 3:00 P.M., this company allows its employees to open beer and wine in the office and just hang out. Nobody gets loaded, but they relax, wind down, and talk with one another. They enter into that relaxed, low-energy mood in the lower right-hand quadrant of Caruso's model.

Your organization may not “bust out the booze” on Fridays and may even have a formal policy against doing so. With or without booze, though, the end of the workweek is a great time to ask such questions as, “What do you think we did best in the past week?” “What process improvement could we make so that our wins would be easier to accomplish?” or “What did we learn this week [about the client, ourselves, and so on]?” You might get fifty ideas in that moment, because people are so open and relaxed. To set the mood, and in lieu of liberating people's creativity with drink, you might say something like, “It's been a long week and we've accomplished a lot as a team, [insert your reflective question here].”

Another approach is to **change the mood** so that it is appropriate to a required task. Let's continue with the example of the group that's in a down mood because of having lost a client. Rather than leveraging that mood, you can use your own energy, enthusiasm, and words to move the group into a high-energy and pleasant state. You could say something such as, “We are all feeling bad about our loss, but our lives are not over. We have a potential client giving us a chance to earn all of their business. Can we come up with one breakthrough idea to capture this opportunity? The people in this room are smart enough and creative enough to do that.”

Keep in mind that using this model does not mean asking, “Which one of these four moods do I want people in on a Monday morning?” This is a futile approach; you need to know the *context*. What is the group trying to accomplish? What does the next challenge look like?

If you can neither leverage the existing mood nor change it, simply acknowledge that this is not a leadership moment for you. It happens. Don’t worry about it; just look for the next opportunity.

### Questions, Questions, Questions

We will close this chapter with seven questions. You should ask yourself the first three before an interaction that you suspect might raise negative emotions.

- How am I feeling right now?
- Why I am feeling this way?
- What emotions am I primed to experience because of my background mood?

Get really good at asking these questions. Do not let yourself off the hook with superficial answers like, “I just do.”

The next two questions will help you manage your emotions during the moment in which they occur.

- Are my emotions intensifying?
- Am I choosing to *allow* my emotions to heighten, or are *they* now in charge?

Be mindful of what is going on inside you in these moments. Practice this skill frequently so that you can stay engaged in the conversation while also monitoring your emotional reaction in real time.



The final questions will help you redirect the emotion toward a positive end.

- What would be a good use of the energy I am feeling right now?
- What could my next step be?

For instance, you might be able to use the energy to tackle a piece of work you have been putting off. If you have been delaying a difficult conversation, use the energy to dial the number; your anger will naturally dissipate once you are dialing. If you are sad, proofread an important document; check the calculations in a key financial analysis. If you are happy, take out twenty Post-it notes and write down the first twenty ideas that come to mind.



A lot of human behavior results from the way we are wired. Our behavioral patterns have formed strong neural pathways in our brains. However, the good news is that our brains *are* changeable.<sup>5</sup> With effort and the right techniques, we can form new pathways and patterns and alter our automatic responses. Practice the techniques we have presented in this chapter, and you can create new ways of thinking, even when you are angry, and you will produce better outcomes for you and others.

## Summary of Key Learnings in Chapter One

- You can leverage your negative emotions to produce positive outcomes.
- The key to developing your ability to remain intelligent, even as your blood begins to boil, is to recognize that you're not

necessarily angry or not angry, but that there are many levels of anger.

- If you can remain aware of what is happening in your body, you'll stay at the stage in which you are simply irritated and not let the emotion get out of hand, until you develop the skill of handling more intense emotions.
- Stepping up in those moments in which other people are angry requires both the ability to make productive use of your own negative emotions and the skill to help others do the same.
- Knowing that there is an optimal mood for every task that a group might undertake provides you with leadership opportunities. You can step up to help create the mood.

## Your Next Steps to Step Up and Use Anger Intelligently

- The first step to leveraging your anger is to identify your “triggers”—those people and circumstances that you’ve discovered are likely to anger you. Create a plan for the next time that you expect to be irritated, and rehearse a thoughtful response in lieu of a reaction.
- Identify the next key team meeting you are going to have. Determine what type of work the team will be engaged in and plan to create an appropriate mood (positive mood for creative tasks, negative mood for tasks that involve a search for potential error—for example, risk mitigation planning). Think through your personal repertoire of options for generating different moods in the group. Remember, moods are contagious—so getting in that mood yourself is the first step.
- Identify a recent setback that the team has faced. Challenge yourself as to whether you are using the resulting anger as fuel to drive the team forward. Plan to remind the team of how it felt to suffer a setback (without dwelling on it) and

focus them on what you all are going to do so that such a setback never happens again.

- When examining a setback or failed outcome, go outside first: “What external forces and entities contributed to our loss?” After you’ve completed that, go inside: “How did we help create our own monster? What could we have done differently or better? What will we do differently next time?”

### *Step Up Link*

Mood and Cognition Model



