

Mindfulness effective antidote for anger

There are different kinds of anger

by Bernard Golden

Anger, a powerful and challenging emotion, occurs when you feel a threat to your physical or mental well-being.

As most law enforcement officers know, anger is a total mind-body experience, one that is tension-filled and based on the interplay of feelings, thoughts, and physical reactions within one's body.

How you manage your anger – your quickness to anger, the situations that trigger your anger, and how you respond to anger – becomes habit.

It's the result of your

biological makeup as well as your life experiences and their combined impact on the neuron pathways in your brain.

Anger is part of the "primal" brain's fight-or-flight response and it can help you survive a dangerous situation.

In one's private life as opposed to on the job, acting impulsively when angry, in an attempt to release the tension of threat can also be destructive.

Cultivating "healthy anger" enables you to pause before reacting and engage your "rational" brain, which can help you assess whether the threat you feel is real or perceived, determine the urgency of the situation, and respond appropriately and constructively.

With commitment and practice you can create new neural pathways, overcoming

unwanted habits and creating new patterns of behavior.

Both mindfulness and mindfulness meditation techniques can help you achieve this.

Through focused breathing and meditation, you can learn to detach, observing your anger instead of being overwhelmed by it.

This simple mindfulness exercise, from my book "Overcoming Destructive Anger," offers one way to stay in touch with your emotions:

- Make yourself comfortable in a place where you won't be disturbed.

- Gently close your eyes.

- Scan your body – both its surface and its interior. Notice any sensations. Notice the air moving through your nostrils or the rise and fall of your chest. Do this for several minutes.

BERNARD GOLDEN, PHD

Overcoming Destructive Anger



Strategies That Work

- Shift your attention from your breathing and think of a negative emotion you want to address. Recall a situation that aroused this emotion.

- While doing this, scan your body to observe where you feel tension most strongly. Keep scanning your body for any signs of tension.

- Return your attention to the area where you feel the most tension.

- Continue your relaxed breathing, but imagine and feel your breath surrounding and soothing that area. Do this for several minutes.

- If the feeling gets too uncomfortable, focus again on your breath. Once you become calmer, concentrate on the emotion again.

- Finish by practicing your breathing for several minutes and then open your eyes.

In law enforcement, even more so than in many other fields of work, feelings must not interfere with your ability to function on the job. Mindful reflection offers a powerful way to connect with your feelings of anger and the emotions that precede it so you can begin to manage them.

The book offers many other strategies for cultivating healthy anger such as muscle relaxation, visualization, learning how to do a

quick "body check-in," and keeping an "anger log."

The goal is to become aware of your physical and emotional triggers and learn to identify and defuse tension, be compassionate with yourself and others, and communicate assertively (not aggressively) to effectively get what you want and need.

Regardless of how you've handled your anger up to this point in your life, with the right intention you can develop the habits of mind that yield benefits.



Bernard Golden, PhD, is a psychologist and respected anger management authority. He is the author of "Overcoming Destructive Anger" published by Johns Hopkins University Press. For more on cultivating "healthy anger," visit www.AngerManagementEducation.com.

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