

Harness Your Anger's Energy

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Anger isn't just a state of mind. "It's an action emotion," sports psychologist Mitch Abrams told IBD.

Winners know how to get furious effectively, Abrams says, because they learn to control how their bodies react to rage. The best can channel their peeves to power peak performances.

"We're not trying to stop people from being angry," Abrams, author of "Anger Management in Sport," explained. "Being angry is being human. We are trying to help people adjust their moods."

Anger's earned a terrible reputation, Abrams adds. But ire sometimes inspires. "There are times when it's difficult to get motivated, and anger can be that fuel in your belly to help you work on a project when you don't have much in the tank," he said. "But you have to be mindful that very high-level anger can also decrease your performance. And you don't ever want violence in the workplace."

- **Map.** "We all have different levels of anger," said relationship expert April Masini, founder of AskApril.com. "But few of us recognize them as we reach them. Usually, by the time we realize we're angry we're really angry." Self-awareness can level livid impulses.

- **Curb.** Prone to outbursts? Work on becoming more aware of the signals that you're getting mad so you can think carefully about what to do next. "Anger has a strong physiological component. Your heart rate increases, your breathing rate increases," Abrams said. "Use those signs as a cue that it's time to start calming down."

It takes practice. But snuffing a few fumes will make you smarter and healthier.

Workplace anger expert Anna Maravelas, founder of Thera Rising, a conflict resolution firm based in St. Paul, Minn., explains that big-time rage floods the brain with a wash of chemicals that alters how we think. That puts firms and individuals in jeopardy.

"We experience the temporary loss of IQ; memory is impaired," she said. "Chronic anger is a better predictor of heart disease than smoking and high cholesterol."

- **Chill.** Breathe deeply. Take a break. Sip some water. You'll be more effective if you're not at the mercy of mood swings.

"I don't mean you're in the middle of a board meeting and you are going to go into some Zen state," Abrams said. "Adjust the volume on that arousal. Sometimes you want to amp it up; sometimes you want to tone it down."

- **Steer.** Abrams worked as a nightclub bouncer when he was in graduate school. Now he runs a program that helps New Jersey prisoners learn to control their emotions.

If you're about to witness a boardroom head butt, he says, a distraction — "Hey, Joe, look at this number" — works better than telling either party, point blank, to just calm down, already.

- **Train.** Leaders: Hatch a plan for helping perpetually perturbed professionals learn to surf the waves of high emotion.

"Many of us have witnessed managers who have quick tempers," said Lynne Sarikas, executive director of the MBA Career Center at Boston's Northeastern University. "They yell a lot and basically make people afraid of them, and those who work with them are constantly on edge. This type of anger is not productive. It certainly can be career-limiting for the manager longer term, and it often results in significant

staff turnover in the shorter term."

- **Unite.** Team Mad As Heck can transform products or companies — if it's led effectively, Sarikas said: "Anger at situations or issues can be used as a positive motivator to help the group brainstorm an acceptable solution."

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