



## How do You Handle Workplace Conflict?

Have you ever worked with someone like this?

On days when things went smoothly, Mark could be a cooperative and productive member of the team - even very likable. However, other staff never knew when that next outburst or sharp email would occur. Mark didn't realise that people were "walking on eggshells" around him. Even other colleagues with whom Mark thought he had good relationships believed that they had to be careful around him.

People, who show anger at work in unhealthy ways, are typically unaware of how their behaviour affects others or of how their outbursts are affecting their reputations.

Sometimes there will be a "Mark" in your team or organisation and even though you may wish to change his/her behaviour the bottom line is that you can't. What you can concentrate on is how you react to their anger. Your response can alleviate,acerbate or even maintain the situation.

Here are some coaching questions to help you consider your responses to conflict and your own anger in the workplace:

- What is your typical response to other people's anger at work?
- How does this impact on the situation?
- How does this impact on you?
- What choices do you have when someone is "blowing off steam" at your workplace? If your habitual response is helping to maintain this behaviour dynamic what could you do differently instead?
- If you find yourself in disagreement with a colleague try opening up your mind to a different point of view. Ask yourself questions like: "What way of seeing this issue am I attached to or defending?" "What would happen if I looked at this in a new way?"
- Just as outbursts of anger at work are unhealthy for all concerned, bottling up anger at work is also not an optimal way to deal with situations. How are you expressing/not expressing your own anger at work?
- How do you express anger in a healthy way? Using more "I's" than "you's" is a good start as it keeps the conversation about yourself and assists you to steer away from blaming others.

- Anger is a secondary emotion. There are often lots of other feelings that we feel first, such as frustration, disappointment or worry. How do you discuss your feelings at work? With a close colleague? Openly as a team?
- Where do you feel anger physically? Do you feel sick in the stomach? Get flushed? Have sweaty palms? Staying aware of body signals can help stop you before a regretful outburst.

Conflict at work can be positive. As long as people see it as a chance to assertively air legitimate views, it can often lead to new and enhanced solutions to problems being reached. Workplaces can create a culture where respect is valued and conflict is reduced. If you want to stay aware of your anger at work and maintain respectful relationships, ask yourself the fundamental Choice Theory question before you act: “If I do this, will I get closer to the people who work with me or will I move further away?”

If you would like to learn more about anger, Choice Theory and workplace relations you may wish to attend our **Need2Connect** workshop “Angering at Work”.