

## PRACTICE

### Check Your Anger: How to Keep Your Cool and Keep Business Hot

#### THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

HOME  
NEWS HEADLINES  
PRACTICE  
BUSINESS  
DESIGN

#### MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

#### SHARE A COMMENT

Tell The Editor

Tell A Friend

#### REFERENCE

Nancy D. O'Reilly, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist, researcher, and founder of the WomenSpeak Project, which is based on a decade of research about aging in a youth-driven society. O'Reilly has more than 25 years of experience counseling others on women's issues, aging, mental health, victimization, workplace violence, and stress. A member of the American Psychological Association, O'Reilly is the author of *You Can't Scare Me: Courageous Women Speak About Growing Older in a Youth Oriented Society*. For more information, visit her [Web site](#).

## Is your anger getting the best of you? Take this quiz.

by Nancy O'Reilly, PsyD  
Clinical psychologist



**Summary:** Sally works as a manager for a large architecture firm. Her hours are full of deadlines and pressure to get projects completed on time. In the past, Sally was able to handle the hectic pace and timelines. But lately, vendors have been delayed and there has been high turnover in her department, causing her to feel more stress. She finds herself resentful and easily angered when asked to complete

assignments on short notice. Sally recently lost her composure with her supervisor and was given a warning. She is surprised and concerned by her own reactions. Sally loves the job but really needs some help. What should she do?

A friend of Sally's recently went through a divorce and used the company's referral service to find a specialist to help her cope. Sally calls her friend and gets the number, taking the time to learn how to manage her anger better and improve the workplace situation.



Does this situation sound familiar? Is your anger making trouble for you? When a customer or supervisor is upset, does it make you more emotional? Are you guilty of taking out your anger and frustration on colleagues, or even friends and family? Take this quiz to see if you are losing out on business and relationships by letting your anger get the best of you.

### The quiz

- When I become angry, I react impulsively and without thinking. **T/F**
- When someone I know is angry and upset, I also become angry and upset. **T/F**
- I am easily embarrassed and humiliated, and when I feel these emotions I become angry. **T/F**
- I become upset easily and find it hard to calm down once I become emotional. **T/F**
- I often have to apologize to others for losing my temper. **T/F**
- Once I am upset, I'm unable to give myself time to recover my composure. **T/F**
- I don't seem to know my emotional limits, so my anger is triggered easily and without warning. **T/F**
- People have told me I am verbally abusive and I have occasionally been physically abusive with others, or have struck out by hitting a wall or breaking things. **T/F**
- I feel guilty for having negative feelings and being angry, but these feelings keep coming back. **T/F**

### What to do

Now tally up your responses. If you checked “true” for five or more of the items, your level of anger may be harmful to yourself or to others, not to mention your business. Now is the time to reign in those emotions and use your passion in a positive way to improve relationships and profits. Here are some tips for managing your emotions the next time you are in a situation that causes your anger to bubble over.

1. **Allow time for anger to subside.** Allow quiet time—allow for silence. You cannot solve problems when you are extremely emotional.
2. **Refocus on what you want to see happen.** Ask yourself: What do I want the outcome of this situation to be?
3. **Acknowledge the situation.** Keep your voice calm. Use eye contact and slow, but firm, gestures. Let the person know you want to talk and also to listen to what he or she has to say.
4. **Don't jump in with both feet!** Start gently and move to heavier responses, only if necessary. Give the other person options. Look for solutions and be ready to compromise.
5. **Find a way for all parties to save face.** No one wants to be blamed or embarrassed by the situation.
6. **Maintain respect.** Don't scold or humiliate. Treat the other person in an adult manner, even if their behavior appears childish.
7. **At the first sign of anger, decide whether it is better to probe for more information or to acknowledge the feelings.** Sometimes an open-ended or factual question redirects the party; at other times, the emotion is the dominant message and requires attention. Caution: In some situations, calling attention to the emotion can actually increase the intensity of the anger.
8. **Give the person time.** Take the pressure off the situation and allow a cooling off time. People de-escalate at different rates. Usually, the more upset a person is, the longer it will take him or her to calm down. Take a time out, too, until you are calm.
9. **Don't try to discuss the content until the person is calm, and you are calm.**
10. **Be aware that the person may become angry again.** Once again, take time out.
11. **Use empathy carefully.** Overstating or understating the intensity of someone's feelings may trigger further anger.
12. **Ensure your own safety.** Don't put yourself physically between two angry people. Physical behavior never solves problems. In fact, if it escalates to this kind of aggressive behavior, don't hesitate to call the police.
13. **Know your limits.** Never enter a situation you think may become physical. Verbal or physical abuse is not acceptable.



### **Don't let anger win**

Anger is an emotion we all experience at some point in our life and will no doubt be back again. There is an array of differences in a person's reaction and response when angered. Some people use their anger to get them moving in the right direction. For others, it may not be easy to use that anger to motivate. Instead, it grows to become an out-of-control situation.

If you find that you are not able to curb your anger, it may be time to seek outside assistance. Many companies have an internal employee assistance program (EAP) or make referrals to a mental health professional. EAPs work with employees and their families with everyday living problems. If your company does not have an internal EAP, check with your health-care provider for professional assistance. Do not let anger win. You can take charge of your emotions in the workplace and beyond.