Ed Bonner considers

The case for... and against Anger

C an anger actually be beneficial to anyone? Surely not. Think about the way angry people behave: they are impa- tient; they get frustrated in queues or when being held on the phone; they are intolerant of others’ opinion; they mutter to themselves, or they raise their voices, often to the level of shouting; they are easily wound up; they take a swipe at or throw an inanimate object; they slam doors and drawers, phones and steering wheels; they drink tea, coffee and probably alcohol to excess. Angry people over-react and tend to catastrophise by being over- or melodramatic: ‘We’ll never see that patient again,’ they mutter to themselves or blame others for their problems before turning their anger in on themselves.

The consequences

Can the consequences of such behaviour be beneficial? Again surely not. High blood pressure, stress headaches and stomach disorders (some even believe anger is a potent cause of cancer); conflict with one’s friends, colleagues and family; lack of concentra- tion; the possibility of causing injury or even death. Ulti- mately, this leads to loss of respect from others and certainly from oneself; feelings of inability to cope, depression, alcoholism; loss of jobs or businesses—none of these can be desirable.

What are the signs of uncontrolled or dissipated anger? Making first small then big mis- takes; dropping the ball; being ex- cessively argumentative; burn- ing food while cooking; forgetful- ness; change in eating patterns; making first small then big mistakes; dropping the ball; being excessively argumentative; burning food while cooking; forgetfulness; inability to complete tasks; yelling at people who keep you waiting when on the phone or in line; having a “blame figure”—one particular person who seems to be responsible whenever something goes wrong.

The up-side

Yet, believe it or not, anger can have a positive side. Scientists at Harvard University even believe it can have a beneficial effect on your career. They found that people who vented their feelings rather than suppressing them were less likely to feel trapped under a glass ceiling. According to an article in the Guardian newspaper, Professor George Vaillant, lead scientist of the study, ‘Individuals who learn how to express their anger while avoiding the explo- sive and self-destructive conse- quences of unbridled fury have achieved something incredibly powerful in terms of overall emotional growth and mental health’.

Venting the pressure-cooker

According to Guardian jour- nalist Julian Baggini, at work (or at home), the individual who is com- pletely emotionally repressed and suppressed is often more difficult to deal with than its volcanic coun- terpart. When one consistently tries to cool down hot emotion and leave it unstated and unresolved, the emotion can get lost, leaving behind a cold-blooded “heartless automaton”. Emotions are nei- ther good nor bad—what matters is how— and when—we deal with them. Better to deal with a rela- tively minor irritant properly by venting it at an early stage rather than store it and magnify it and let it loose later when you finally ex- plose. A one-minute loosing of feelings will tend to be forgotten quite quickly, whereas a 50- minute tirade may take days to be forgiven and is rarely forgotten.

The European way

Think about the way we think of continental Europeans: hot- blooded ultra-passionistas who shout at rather than talk to each other. Yet they are less likely to get into a fight or get drunk than we reserved British.

Anger should be seen as a jus- tified response to wrong-doing, but it should be proportionate. It should also be focused on the is- sue rather than on the person. It cannot be stated that uncontrolled anger is beneficial, but controlled low-level anger can be a useful and proper way to vent one’s feelings before they collect up and finally explode.

Are you for or against the argument that anger can be benefi- cial? Email jury@dentaltribu- nesuk.com and share your thoughts

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