

## ARTICLE REPRINT

### Anger and The 80% Rule

At one time or another all of us have encountered a customer or a co-worker who became angry as we negotiated with them about business or personal matters. The most successful negotiators recognize the basis of anger and what to do when they encounter someone who is angry.

First, it's important to understand what drives people to anger. There are three primary causes of anger – fear, hurt, and frustration. People exhibit anger when they are afraid of something, when they are hurting psychologically for some reason, or when they are simply frustrated.

The customer who becomes angry because she cannot obtain the low, implicit interest rate that her boss asked her to secure from their bank isn't angry because of the higher interest rate. That's just a number. The cause of her anger is most likely the fear she feels when she contemplates telling her boss she failed to secure the low interest rate he wanted.

If, for some reason beyond your control, you aren't able to provide a service to a long-time customer, he may perceive your failure to help as a sign of his and his company's diminished importance to you and your company. The result may be a customer who experiences hurt feelings. These hurt feelings can manifest as anger directed toward you or your company.

Sometimes people express anger simply out of frustration. I've often observed that no one appears upset, irritated or really angry when things are going their way! When a client or co-worker faces one too many obstacles in a day, their increasing frustrations may result in a display of anger directed at anyone within shouting distance.

Although there are three primary drivers of anger, sometimes anger is employed as a manipulation against others. In some negotiations, like labor contract talks, anger is used by experienced negotiators as a favorite tactic to coerce, intimidate and threaten the other side. This manufactured anger has become part of the way the labor contract negotiation game is played.

Whatever the source of someone's anger, it's important to remember that your reaction determines, to a large degree, how the negotiation proceeds and ends. According to research done at the Harvard Negotiation Project, there is an 80% chance that you can influence, and even control the atmosphere and tone of a negotiation simply by exhibiting the type behavior you desire from your negotiating partners.

If you find yourself negotiating with someone who is angry, or irritated, and you want to control the tone of the negotiation, don't buy into their anger or frustration. Instead, remain calm, and listen carefully to what your negotiation partner says. At some point, in 80% of all cases, your negotiating partner will calm down and will begin to mirror your calm, restrained behavior. Very few people will argue with themselves or maintain anger when there is no reaction from the other side of the table!

In tough negotiations, remember the 80% rule. By definition, it doesn't always work, but knowing that you have an 80% chance of controlling the tone and atmosphere in any negotiation, simply by exhibiting the type of behavior you want from your negotiating partners, keeps the 80% rule on your side.

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