

The Foolproof Way to Stay Calm and
in Control in Any Conversation or Situation

NEVER

GET



ANGRY

AGAIN

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*New York Times Bestselling Author of
Get Anyone to Do Anything and Never Be Lied to Again*

NEVER GET ANGRY AGAIN



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in Any Conversation or Situation**



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[Begin Reading](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Let's face it, if anger-management techniques were effective, you wouldn't be reading this book. You've probably tried it all: positive self-talk, punching a pillow, and reminding yourself that no good will come from getting angry. But the next time you feel your blood boiling or you start to fly into a blind rage, see how well counting to ten works for you.

These clumsy attempts to maintain calmness are often futile and sometimes emotionally draining. Anger-management books typically feature these tried-and-not-true methods, along with generic case studies, personal anecdotes, and bumper-sticker slogans. The fact is, either something bothers us (causing anxiety, frustration, or anger) or it doesn't. Yes, our objective is to remain calm, but we can better accomplish this by not becoming agitated in the first place. When we fight the urge to blow up or melt down, we struggle against our own nature.

THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION

What makes some people able to handle life's ups and downs, the twists and turns, bumps and bruises with steadfast calm and composure, while others become incensed at the slightest insult, fall apart when facing a minor frustration, and blow out of proportion a mild disappointment?

In a word: perspective.

Imagine a small child playing with a toy that suddenly breaks. The child's whole world shatters, and she may respond by crying or becoming despondent, sad, or even angry. The child fails to appreciate, let alone recognize, all of the goodness in her life: that she is still being clothed, fed, loved, and taken care of—not to mention that an entire world exists outside of her own smaller world. The child's parents know the broken toy has no real relevance because they have perspective that the child lacks.

Intellectually, we may recognize the unimportance and insignificance of whatever made us angry. Yet the qualities that most of us strive to exemplify—such as objectivity and patience—are lost to frustration when, in a hurry, we encounter a checkout clerk with a trainee name tag staring at the cash register as if it were the cockpit of the space shuttle. We try to maintain our cool, but negative emotions surface and, once sparked, blaze. Now we face an uphill battle.

Perspective lies at the crux of our response and explains why we often feel irritated in the heat of the moment. After a few minutes, our anger subsides. A few hours later, we feel less angry, and in a few days, we wonder why we got so bothered in the first place. Time provides perspective, allowing us to see the situation with clarity. Likewise, as we grow and mature, we look back on our lives and realize that the summer camp we thought we *must* attend, the person we thought we *must* be friends with, or the office job we thought we *must* be offered are no longer *musts*. Without perspective, we are forever like a child with a broken toy.

THE MILLION-DOLLAR ANSWER

Mark Twain wrote, “Comedy is tragedy plus time.” When we discover how to shift our perspective, we see today's events through the wiser, more balanced lens of tomorrow. Once we can recognize—in the moment—what really matters, we no longer need to force ourselves to remain calm. Our thoughts, feelings, and responses to any situation reshape themselves. Negative emotions like impatience, insecurity, and anger dissolve—not because we

fight to control our emotions but, rather, because we see the situation for what it really is.

Of course, the question we still face is, “How do we manage what is relevant?” Yes, we know we shouldn’t “sweat the small stuff,” and the only reason we do is that we lack perspective. But what about serious things, such as an illness, an injustice, or a trauma? Objectively, they *are* a big deal. To handle such crises with equanimity, we learn to pull back the lens even further, to find peace of mind regardless of the present or pending situation; and gain the presence of mind to take responsible action.

Metaphorically speaking, typical anger-management tools are akin to weed killer: You have to keep spraying all of the time, every time, to keep weeds from sprouting up—and no matter how vigilant you are, you’ll still miss plenty, and you are left exhausted. *Never Get Angry Again* explains how to pull up weeds by their roots by looking at reality—ourselves, our lives, and our relationships—with optimum perspective and emotional clarity.

Through a comprehensive, holistic lens, we reveal and illuminate the causes and components of anger. These often include the gaping hole in our self-esteem due to a rotten (chaotic or traumatic) childhood, failing or failed relationships with those important to us, or living a life that lacks any real passion and joy—all fueled by an undercurrent of resentment as we wonder, where is God in all of this? *Life is unfair, so either He’s not in charge, He doesn’t care, or He simply hates me.* Not exactly self-esteem boosters or anger reducers.

Certainly, even with the proper perspective, we can get caught up in the moment. High-intensity situations can provoke us to throw reason and rationale right out the window, as our emotions erupt before we even know what’s happening. Yet it doesn’t have to be like this. Should an errant weed pop up under extreme circumstances, you can still maintain complete control. By using cutting-edge research from the field of neuroplasticity, you can literally rewire your brain to automatically take over, even when you feel as if you’re losing your mind.

Now, as the saying goes, “it takes two to tango.” While a challenging life circumstance is one thing, the truth is, we wouldn’t have to manage our anger if the people in our lives would manage their stupidity. Some folks—family, friends, and coworkers—just push our buttons. In keeping with my penchant for the practical, you will learn step-by-step strategies to redraw boundaries, quash personality conflicts, and navigate difficult relationships to maintain (or reclaim) your sanity and eradicate a breeding ground for anger and frustration.

UNMASKING THE ENEMY

Various techniques will help us succeed in controlling our anger, but they can’t create awareness. Only the complete recognition of the apparatus—and the foolishness and futility—of anger will organically motivate us to keep our calm. For this reason, the first several sections of this book are descriptive; they explain the psychological dynamics of anger and of human nature. The latter sections are prescriptive, offering a range of psychological tools and techniques to win the ground war. But do not underestimate the power of understanding the enemy, anger. In any anger-provoking situation, we would love to ask ourselves, *Why am I really getting angry?* But of course, we can’t ask the question because we aren’t thinking; we are only feeling. At that moment, nobody’s home, and this is the fatal flaw in the tradition of anger management. However, when we wholly embrace the answer to this question with every fiber of our being *before* the situation arises, even when we lose perspective, the truth is baked into our very nature, and a calm and controlled response becomes second nature.

THE TAKEAWAY

Never Get Angry Again shows you how to permanently reorient your perspective. This will automatically take life’s little things right off your radar, and the big stuff will never again manifest as fiery fits of uncontrollable anger or rage, but instead be instantly viewed through the

lens of authentic acceptance. Discover the easy way to live anger-free and never get angry again—unless you want to.

PART I

**THE REAL REASON YOU ARE
SO ANGRY**

1

How Perspective Takes Shape

Three forces within us are often at odds with one another: the soul, the ego, and the body. In short, the soul seeks to do what is right; the ego wants to be right and see itself in an optimal light; and the body just wants to escape from it all. When you make any decision in life:

- You can choose what feels good.
- You can choose what makes you look good.
- You can choose to do what is good or right.

Doing what feels comfortable or enjoyable is a body drive. Excesses of this type are overeating or oversleeping—in effect, doing something merely because it feels good. When we act based on an ego drive, it can run the gamut from telling a joke at someone else's expense to making a lavish purchase that's beyond our means. When the ego reigns, we are not drawn to what *is* good, but to what makes us *look* good.

We gain self-esteem only when we make responsible choices and do what is right—this is a soul-oriented (moral or conscience) choice. Indeed, this is how self-esteem and self-control are intertwined. Emotional freedom doesn't mean doing whatever we feel like doing; rather, it is doing what we truly

want to do, despite our desires at the moment. Imagine being on a diet and suddenly feeling the urge to eat a piece of chocolate. We fight the temptation but eventually give in. Is this freedom or slavery? We felt like eating a piece of chocolate, and we did it. Did we like how we felt afterward? When we choose responsibly, we exercise self-control and increase our self-esteem.

DO GOOD TO FEEL GOOD

Each time we sacrifice what is responsible because we can't rise above the whims of an impulse or sell ourselves out to win the praise or approval of others, we lose self-respect. When we routinely succumb to immediate gratification or live to protect and project an image, we become angry with ourselves and ultimately feel empty inside. To quiet the unconscious gnawing that says, *I don't like me*, we do whatever we can to feel good. We long to love ourselves, but instead we lose ourselves. Unable to invest in our own well-being, we spiral downward to the hollow, self-destructive refuge of activities that take us away from the pain: excessive eating, alcohol or drug abuse, and meaningless diversions and excursions. These ethereal delights mask our self-contempt, and because the happiness we seek instead results in greater pain, we descend further into despair—and into hiding.

Let's look at this another way: Have you ever tried to have a pleasant conversation with someone you didn't like? Or to spend an hour or entire day with someone who gets on your nerves? It's almost painful. What if you lived with that person—and that person happened to be you? Everything in life is draining for the person who doesn't like who he has become. It's like working for a boss we despise; even the most minor task triggers annoyance. Would we work hard for or invest in—let alone love and respect—an ungrateful, out-of-control person? You might try to quiet or distract him with pointless pursuits or endless entertainment, or even help him to get lost in a haze of abusive behaviors—as long as you don't have to face him, much less help him.

To the extent that we don't love ourselves, our willingness to endure short-term pain for long-term gain wanes. Who wants to put in effort,

enduring heartache and hardship, for someone whom they don't even like? This mind-set is understandable but quite problematic. When we too often shirk our obligations and shun new opportunities, we lose more than we might imagine. Studies show that our tendency to avoid the pain inherent in taking responsibility for our lives is at the core of anger, and is central to nearly every emotional ailment, including anxiety, depression, and addiction.¹

PERSPECTIVE = MENTAL HEALTH

As our behavior becomes increasingly reckless and irresponsible, the ego swells to compensate for feelings of guilt, insecurity, and shame. Our perspective narrows, and we see more of the self and less of the world—which makes us ever more sensitive and unstable. To the degree that we refuse to accept the truth about ourselves and our lives—and overcome our laziness and fear of pain—the ego engages to “protect” us, and it shifts the blame elsewhere. In other words, *If there is nothing wrong with me, then there must be something wrong with you; or the world is unfair; or people are out to get me.* Seedlings of neuroses and paranoia then take root. For us to remain unblemished in our own minds, we are forced to distort the world around us, and if our grasp on reality is flawed, then our adjustment to life will suffer.²

When a person loses his sanity—the ability to see, accept, and respond to his world—it means he has lost all perspective. Emotional instability—the seat of anger—is fundamentally a lack of clarity, the degree to which the ego infects us.

Responsible (soul-oriented) choice → self-esteem increases → ego shrinks → perspective widens → undistorted reality → see and accept the truth (even when difficult or painful) = positive emotional health → act responsibly

Irresponsible (ego-oriented/overindulgent body) choice → self-esteem decreases → ego expands → perspective narrows → distorted reality → unable/unwilling to see and accept truth (when difficult or painful) = negative mental health → act irresponsibly

2

Angry with Ourselves, Angry at the World

None of us wants to admit, even to ourselves, that we are selfish or lazy, much less a failure or flawed. The ego is thus equipped with an elaborate array of shields and buffers—defense mechanisms—to thwart the harshness of reality. Of course, instead of protecting us (rather than itself), these defense mechanisms lead to increased instability and insecurity. And the wider the chasm between the truth and our ability to accept it, the more fragile our emotional health becomes. In *Reality Therapy*, Dr. William Glasser writes:

In their unsuccessful effort to fulfill their needs, no matter what behavior they choose, all patients have a common characteristic: they all deny the reality of the world around them.... Whether it is a partial denial or the total blotting out of all of reality of the chronic backward patient in the state hospital, the denial of some or all of reality is common to patients. Therapy will be successful when they are able to give up denying the world and recognize that reality exists but that they must fulfill their needs within its framework.¹

Our ego colors the world so that we remain untarnished. Before we airbrush reality, however, a collision occurs in the unaccessed caverns of our unconscious, between truth and falsehood, producing the psychological phenomenon *cognitive dissonance*: the feeling of uncomfortable tension and stress that comes from holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously. It is the by-product of tension between the soul and ego—when we choose to either accept reality or reduce dissonance by any number of defense mechanisms. The most common of these are avoidance, denial, or justification.

Shopaholics are often a good example of cognitive dissonance. Though cognizant of the dangers associated with this addiction, shopaholics may reduce the tension by: (a) avoiding the issue, i.e., putting all expenses on a credit card and not focusing on the money spent; (b) denying that they are addicted and cannot stop—that it is as if their vehicle drives into the nearest mall of its own volition; (c) rationalizing their shopping habits (“If I don’t spend time out of the house, I will go off my diet”); or, the heathiest and most difficult (d) accepting the truth and taking steps to get the needed help.

“Drew Westen and his colleagues (2006) found that the ‘reasoning areas of the brain virtually shut down when a person is confronted with dissonant information and the emotion circuits of the brain light up happily when consonance is restored.’² As Westen put it, people twirl the ‘cognitive kaleidoscope’ until the pieces fall into the pattern they want to see, and then the brain repays them by activating circuits involved in pleasure. It seems that the feeling of cognitive dissonance can literally make your brain hurt!”³

That’s why the ego seizes any opportunity to reconcile internal conflict. The following anecdote illustrates this process, particularly when our self-concept is on the line.

A man woke up one day convinced that he was a zombie. When he told his wife he was a zombie, she tried to talk him out of this outrageous opinion.

“You are not a zombie!” she said.

“I am a zombie,” he answered.

“What makes you think you’re a zombie?” she asked rhetorically.

“Don’t you think zombies know they are zombies?” he answered with great sincerity.

His wife realized she wasn’t getting anywhere, so she called his mother and told her what was going on. His mother tried to help.

“I’m your mother. Wouldn’t I know if I gave birth to a zombie?”

“You didn’t,” he explained. “I became a zombie later.”

“I didn’t raise my son to be a zombie or especially to think he is a zombie,” his mother pleaded.

“Nonetheless, I am a zombie,” he said, unmoved by his mother’s appeal to his identity and sense of guilt.

Later that day, his wife called a psychiatrist.

The receptionist gave the wife an emergency appointment, and within the hour, the husband was in the psychiatrist’s office.

“So, you think you are a zombie?” the psychiatrist asked.

“I know I am a zombie,” the man said.

“Tell me, do zombies bleed?” the psychiatrist asked.

“Of course not,” said the man. “Zombies are the living dead. They don’t bleed.” The man felt a little annoyed at the psychiatrist’s patronizing question.

“Well, watch this,” said the psychiatrist, picking up a pin. He took the man’s finger and made a tiny pinprick. The man looked at his finger with great amazement and said nothing for three or four minutes.

“What do you know?” the man finally said. “Zombies *do* bleed!”⁴

THE MASK THAT DOESN’T COME OFF

Denying reality comes with a price. Exhausted and on edge, our ego edits our world to eliminate anything that will hurt or reveal us, either to ourselves or to others. Preoccupied with potential threats to our self-image, we are on

constant guard. We hide behind a carefully crafted façade, and the identity that we build to shield ourselves soon becomes a shell encasing us. Over time, we fall into a hellish gap of unrealized potential, our true self weakens, and we feel hollow inside. We no longer live for ourselves. We exist only to protect our image, the ego. This includes all of the games we play and the masks we wear to show the rest of the world what we believe is the necessary persona.

We may not even realize how much of our attitude and behavior—indeed, our values and beliefs—we style to avoid self-reflection, to compensate for self-hatred, and to project an image that betrays neither. In the exchange, we lose ourselves, contorting to the rules demanded by others to win their praise. Unsurprisingly, we never feel truly satiated. When we don't love ourselves, we can't give love, and we can't feel loved. Even when the supply of affection and adulation is plentiful, we experience a different reality—an endless flow of tainted love. Ultimately, we remain empty and angry inside.

Imagine pouring water into a cup that has no bottom. As you pour in the water, the cup feels and looks full. As long as the cup is constantly being filled, we feel content. But the minute someone stops filling it (with undivided attention, respect, or adoration), the cup quickly empties, and we are left as thirsty as ever. A shattered cup will never be full, and our thirst can never be quenched, no matter how much we receive. King Solomon, the wisest of men, wrote, "A lacking on the inside can never be satisfied with something from the outside."⁵ People who seek self-esteem from external sources can never be truly content. They are the very epitome of a bottomless pit.

We are hardwired to love ourselves, but when we can't nourish ourselves through good choices and thus gain self-respect, we turn to the rest of the world to feed us. We make a desperate but futile attempt to convert their love and respect into feelings of self-worth. Our ever-shifting self-image becomes a direct reflection of the world around us. Our mood is raw and vulnerable to every fleeting glance and passing comment.

We erroneously and frantically believe, *If they care about me, then maybe I'm worth something, and then maybe I can love me*. Yet it doesn't work, and herein lies the basis for many failed relationships. When we lack self-esteem, we push away the very people we so desperately want in our lives because we can't fathom why anyone would love someone as unlovable as ourselves. And whatever affection or kindness forces its way through to us, we hardly embrace it. Such overtures don't serve to comfort but, rather, to confuse us; and the ego's mandate is clear: reject others before they have a chance to reject us.

To compound matters, the less self-control we have, the more desperately we manipulate events and people around us, especially those closest to us—either overtly or passive-aggressively. We intuit that self-control fosters self-respect, so when we cannot control ourselves, we need to feel as if we are in control of someone, something, anything, to feel a sense of power (the intricacies of which are further detailed in Chapter 4). Low self-esteem can thus trigger a powerful unconscious desire to usurp authority, to overstep bounds, and to mistreat those who care about us. When we don't like who we are, we cannot help but become angry with ourselves. Then we take it out on the world around us and on the people who care most about us.

3

Isolated from Ourselves, Disconnected from Others

For better or worse, our emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being feasts on, and fuels, the quality of our relationships—past and present. The previous chapter explained that people with low self-esteem have difficulty receiving love; indeed, they cannot easily give love, either. We can only give what we have. We give love. We give respect. If we don't have it, what do we have to give?

GIVE AND TAKE

Love is limitless. A parent does not love her second child less because she already has one child. She loves each child, gives to each child, and does not run out of love. Compare this to someone who acquires a work of art that he “loves.” Over time, his fascination with the piece wanes, and when he acquires a new work, all of his attention, affection, and joy are redirected from the old art to the new art because, in truth, he does not care for his art. He cares for himself, and his art makes him happy. He is not giving to his art; his art gives to him, and so he takes. A person may say, “*I love cookies.*”