



Maine-based psychologist AMY WOOD, Psy.D. created Law and the Good Life, a research-based attorney wellness coaching and training system designed to address the challenges of lawyering. She frequently offers CLE opportunities through the MSBA. To learn about upcoming events, visit [www.mainebar.org](http://www.mainebar.org). For more information about Dr. Wood, go to [www.amywoodpsyd.com](http://www.amywoodpsyd.com).

## Want To Be Happier? Admit Your Anger

Perhaps you know someone who seems unruffled all the time and claims to never be angry about anything. This person likely says supposedly encouraging things that linger with traces of resentment, tension, and your nagging sense that there's ire simmering somewhere. You've probably learned to temper yourself in this person's presence because passionate venting usually results in patronizing comments.

"Why are you getting so emotional? I *never* get mad."

*One sure indicator that someone is angry is insistence that no anger exists.*

There's plenty to be mad about as an attorney – too much work, not enough support, lack of control over the court system. That's not to mention the broader issues of disease, abuse, and prejudice, for starters. These things anger us all, and it's perfectly normal to want to lash out occasionally at injustices and inequities. Those who claim to be eternally fine in the face of all unfairness are either completely checked out or lying. And appearing perpetually cool and composed on the outside may project internal serenity, but unacknowledged anger doesn't go anywhere. It simply bubbles up and seeps out via snarky remarks, impulsive outbursts, recurring health issues, or worse.

Though anger is unattractive and inconvenient, and can be intimidating in its force, the benefit to embracing it as a customary part of lawyering and adulthood is that you become ultimately happier. Facing anger takes courage and humility – precisely what people who claim never to be angry lack – and the reward of taking on that challenge is true inner peace.

Here are four suggestions for handling the reality of anger so that it doesn't sneak out and keep you (and the people you interact with) off balance:

***Become more involved with others face-to-face.*** Have you noticed that it's much easier to be angry with people from a safe distance? Think about it. When someone cuts you off while you're driving or posts something offensive on the Internet, angry judgments – What a jerk! You are such an idiot! – are automatic and uninhibited. You are much more likely to be measured when you confront someone in the flesh and acknowledge that they are a human being much greater than whatever the gesture or statement that got your blood boiling.

***Cultivate productive ways to let off steam.*** How angry you become in response to a trigger – getting overlooked or taken for granted, for example – is directly proportional to how stressed out you are. The lower your stress level, the less pronounced your anger will be. Given that there are anger triggers everywhere, it's wise to always be working on keeping your stress level to a minimum by giving yourself routine outlets: regular exercise, meaningful connecting with family and friends, creative expression through painting, writing, dancing or whatever art or craft you're into; plenty of fresh air and breaks from work. When you make letting loose a healthy habit, you'll be able to resolve your anger and move on more quickly whenever something jostles you.

***Address anger as it happens.*** Anger becomes toxic to your health when it brews over time into bitterness, so it's important to manage it incident by incident. This means communicating assertively (i.e., gently yet firmly) with the person you're mad at, or perhaps discussing your anger with an objective friend or therapist if the source of your anger can't be named or reasoned with. Talking helps to get anger out of your system so that more enjoyable feelings can rise up and take hold.



***Channel your anger into positive change.***

Anger is an energizing emotion – as opposed to, let’s say, sluggish depression or paralyzing anxiety – and so it can lead to great things when directed appropriately. If you’re angry about a stubborn situation, the lack of help for a serious quandary, then ask yourself what you can do to produce a solution. What are you sick and tired of in yourself, at home, at work, in your community? If the problem isn’t going away anytime soon, vow to take charge and make a difference. The purpose of anger becomes abundantly clear when you see the bold and liberating signs of progress – better laws, safer precautions, wider acceptance, bigger opportunities – that happen when angry people simply refuse to tolerate infuriating conditions any longer.



MaineCF grant support helped establish the Woodward Point Preserve in Brunswick. Photo Yoon Byun

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