
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: 7 WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANGRY PEOPLE

SUBSCRIPTIONS INCREASE SINCE JAN 1, 2005: 45%

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. 7 WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANGRY PEOPLE
2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENTS
3. CHUCKLES
4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH
5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER
6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE
7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does." -- William James

"The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." -- Marcel Proust

"A jest often decides matters of importance more effectively and happily than seriousness." -- Horace

1. 7 WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANGRY PEOPLE

1. WALK AWAY

This is always a viable option. It's a good option when you feel the one confronting you is being abusive or disrespectful. It's also a good option when you feel that, if you respond, you will respond emotionally in a way that does not further your interests. For example, if you have an interest in maintaining a relationship or some good standing with the angry person, and you believe that by responding you will probably escalate the situation because you are also angry, then walking away is a good option. You can simply say, "I'm not

going to talk about this now. We can get to this when we're both calm." Or, if appropriate, you can say, "I'll be glad to talk to you about this, but not while you're speaking to me in that way and that tone." The walk away strategy is also helpful when you want time to prepare yourself, perhaps by getting information, before going back to manage the confrontation. Finally, walking away is a decent choice when you just don't care, when the conflict, issue or complaint just does not matter to you. In that case, why waste your energy or feed into it?

2. APOLOGIZE

If you are clearly in the wrong, why not? Medical doctors have begun to relearn this lesson: apologizing to patients for mistakes actually reduces the risk of being sued. Now, there are some conflict averse people who apologize unnecessarily, and that's not a good thing. But there are also people who seem unrealistically loath to acknowledge the obvious by way of apology. If you're wrong, get it out of the way. Even if your confronter is also partly wrong, get your part out of the way. Once you do, it will be easier to wrap up the rest of the situation.

3. RESET THE TONE

This is a spin off of the "walk away" option. Let's say you use the approach mentioned above, saying something like, "I'm not going to talk about this now. We can get to this when we're both calm," or "I'll be glad to talk to you about this, but not while you're speaking to me in that way and that tone." The one confronting you may immediately respond by becoming more controlled and reasonable. In that case, if you feel you can be reasonable in kind, and you don't want to escalate the situation, you can proceed to work through the conflict, using good communication skills. By essentially setting the ground rules for the way the conversation must flow as a condition for your participation, you can potentially reset the tone. Of course, if you're not ready to have the discussion, you can still walk away, but this approach can help you reset the tone.

4. GO INTO "REPORTER MODE"

This is one of my favorite strategies. I almost always use the same words, almost verbatim: "Okay, I want to listen to everything you have to say. Let's just slow down and let me get this straight." Then I take out a pad and take notes. I only interrupt to ask clarifying questions to get to the facts. The idea here is to act like a reporter: you want the "who, what, where and when." I don't make defensive counterstatements, and I don't add my own facts into the conversation. . . at least not yet.

This accomplishes a number of things. Since I am taking notes, I can take some control of the conversation: the speaker tends to slow down to make sure I'm getting everything. Also, the process of taking notes frees me from the natural desire to respond, react and defend myself: I can stall for time behind my reportorial posture. I also tend to get more information than I would have had, so any responses I formulate are more on target. By the time my attacker gets through with telling me the story, he is usually considerably more calm, satisfied that I have listened fully.

Once it's clear that I have gotten all the facts from my attacker's point of view, then I have options. I can say I will get back to him, if I want time to think or to gather more information. I can respond immediately, and if interrupted, I'll say something like, "hey, I listened to your side, so let's be fair here and give me a chance." That almost always works. By the time all of this is done, the conflict has usually been diffused and some agreement or mutual understanding achieved. Perhaps the neatest thing about this strategy is the way taking out the notebook transforms the dynamic of the exchange from one of opposition to collaboration in getting the details of the situation right. It just happens, without my attacker even becoming aware it's happening. Not bad.

5. ADD HUMOR

Sometimes this works, and sometimes it backfires. Very angry people won't take it well, but less angry people can sometimes be calmed down with a few one-liners. You don't have to get an outright laugh: I define humor as that which produces a smile, even a grudging one. Of course, if you don't have the knack for this, don't try it. But for those who have a quick wit, as long as you don't wield it like a scalpel to belittle your attacker, you can change the dynamic of the interaction. Self-effacing humor is often the best and most effective in these kinds of situations.

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6. VALIDATE THE EMOTION

Yeah, I know: you expect to hear this from a shrink, but it typically works, and it helps. When someone angry with you is explaining the circumstances that precipitated the anger, find your own way of conveying the following kinds of ideas: “Yeah, I can see how that would be frustrating,” or, “Well, I can see how that upsets you.” Don’t memorize a scripted phrase, because it probably won’t come naturally to you, and you will sound phony. But listen for the underlying feeling and acknowledge it. In rare cases, this will only serve to escalate your attacker (“You’re damn RIGHT it made me angry!”), but usually it will help diffuse the situation. Finding ways, like this one, to show that you understand often helps.

7. ESCALATE, THREATEN OR CONFRONT

Of course, there are some circumstances when you don’t want to soothe the angry person, or don’t really have an interest in preserving a relationship or coming to some mutual understanding. If burning the relationship in favor of upholding some boundaries of action or behavior is in your interests, then you can seek to overpower or otherwise shut your attacker down. There’s nothing wrong with that. Sometimes, for example, a simple “Look, you’re out of line. Keep this up and you’ll be out of a job!” is what’s called for, if the situation is extreme enough. Some people argue back, aggressively, to win the confrontation, and there are times to do this, too. But, if you have an interest in maintaining some ties with the individual in question, or want to keep your options for further alliance open, if only for convenience sake, then this is not the way to go. But there’s nothing wrong with it; it’s all a matter of what your interests are, when rationally considered. While we all have our preferred styles for managing confrontation, it’s best to practice and know when to use all of these techniques, because you’ll have more options and be more flexible in dealing with all kinds of situations.

2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENT

FILM: “Good Night and Good Luck” in limited release

Hey, I like movies filmed in black and white. I also like shorter movies, tightly written scripts, and good guys standing up to powerful people. I also like corporate leaders making risky decisions. What's not to like? Some people don't like George Clooney's politics, and for the purposes of this newsletter, I stay out of that kind of discussion. But the movie works. I also saw the new Harry Potter along the way, and it was okay, though I don't really get the Harry Potter series appeal, myself. And anyway, you don't need me to talk to you about that movie. If you have email (and you do!) and you have been alive recently, then you have been sufficiently marinated in Potter propaganda to have made up your own mind about that one already. More reviews of Good Night and Good Luck can be found [here](#).

Book: The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald

You know, I changed high schools between tenth and eleventh grade, and because of the change in curricula, I never had to read this for school. And more to my shame, I never read it on my own afterward. Until now. A classic, and a case study that applies to many I've seen in my consulting career. Maybe it's a particularly American thing, to believe so fervently one can reinvent oneself and bend reality to fit your fantasy, but I doubt it. I won't say more now, because I'm considering writing a future newsletter based on my thoughts from the novel, but in the meantime, you can find this one in paperback [here](#).

3. CHUCKLES

After being away on business for a week before the Christmas Holiday, Bob thought it would be nice to bring his wife a gift.

"How about some perfume?" he asked the cosmetics woman at the Department Store. So, she showed him a bottle of \$50 perfume.

"That's a bit much," said Bob. The woman then returned with a smaller bottle costing \$30.

Bob complained, "That's still a lot of money."

Growing disgusted, the woman brought out her smallest little bottle of \$15 perfume.

Bob grew even more restless and replied, "No, no... What I mean is I'd like to see something really cheap!"

So the clerk handed him a mirror!!

4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

You don't have to live near the Schuler Solutions main office in Alexandria, Virginia to benefit from my coaching services. Great work can be done for your own growth and development over the phone and through document review via email. To find out more about your coaching options and available coaching plans, just click [here](#) now.

5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership, negotiation and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching for highly motivated clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

NEWSLETTER ETHICS: This e-Newsletter will be sent to subscribers only upon REQUEST, though subscribers may forward this letter to anyone they wish. Subscriber identities or contact information will NOT BE DISCLOSED to any other persons or entities under any circumstances. (An attorney friend recently pointed out that, technically, I'd have to give up my list if compelled to do so by a court of law. He's technically right, of course, but let's face it: that won't happen!)

Have a great month. . .

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D.

Schuler Solutions, Inc.

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"Make each day your masterpiece." -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend! Thanks . . . AJS