

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford

Work in Progress is an electronic newsletter intended to assist individuals seeking optimum well-being.

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Feature Article: When Anger Hurts: Knowing there is a difference between Healthy and Unhealthy Anger

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In this Issue:

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- 1) Note from Michele
- 2) Feature Article
- 3) About Michele
- 4) Counselling Services

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1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

Since returning to the Lower Mainland, I have witnessed the most astonishing displays of rage by drivers of all sorts of description. Their outrage is usually the result of the most inconsequential occurrences: sometimes others' mistakes and sometimes only the realistic results of traffic in a crowded city.

In the moment of their tirade, it's obvious they feel completely justified in their anger and behaviour. I wonder if they know what they really look like. I wonder if they know what damage they are

doing to their health at a very deep cellular level. I also wonder if they have regret after they calm down. Would they be embarrassed if a tape of their performance was played on the news? Would they direct that kind of behaviour toward anyone if they were not sheltered in their car?

In the model I use in counselling, Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy, language and the meaning of words is a foundational element. Since words make up thoughts and thoughts directly control 90% of your emotion, behaviour and your fight or flight response, semantics clearly helps define the beliefs that lead to healthy outcomes as well as the beliefs that create unhealthy consequences.

In my next newsletter, I will outline the particular beliefs that lead to over-reactions but first, I want to discuss anger itself. There is indeed a distinction between healthy and unhealthy anger.

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## 2) Feature Article: When Anger Hurts: Knowing there is a difference between Healthy and Unhealthy Anger

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The most telling clue of whether or not your anger is beneficial is to investigate the consequences. Did you act in your own best interests? Did you remain authentic to your high standards of integrity and decorum? Did you stress your physical health in any way? Do you have any regrets about your behaviour or emotion after some calming time has passed? Did you hurt anyone else or trespass against their basic human rights?

How would you know if you are experiencing healthy anger or unhealthy anger? Understanding is in the semantics; your use of language makes the distinction.

Healthy Anger Defined

Frustration, mostly related to impatience, is a negative emotion that is healthy in many respects. Like the other healthy kinds of anger, it is an appropriate feeling, always in context, that elevates little affect (fight or flight response). This affect is not enough to raise stress levels or damage your immune system. But it does provide energy to motivate you towards a solution to the problem. For example, social injustice is only tackled when you are frustrated and fed up.

Irritation helps to define boundaries. These include the boundaries of assertiveness, personal space, human rights and identity.

Annoyance motivates you to speak out. It allows for the expression of grievances, displeasure and being wronged in a dignified manner.

Aggravation is a healthy manifestation of dismay, unhappiness with a mistake or transgression, resistance to unwanted pressure, and so on.

While they can sometimes be extremely intense, all of these illustrations of anger allow for a calm and persistent request for your wants and needs, to hold your ground and to express your opinion while highlighting respect and dignity.

These forms of anger allow you to recover fairly quickly and move on, do not compromise your health and most of all, keep you free from suffering remorse for the infantile and destructive behaviour that accompanies unhealthy anger.

Unhealthy Anger Delineated

Resentment is anger that builds over time, often without a voice. When resentment sometimes erupts into an intense explosion, it's called passive aggressive.

Hostility is anger that is disproportionate to the event. It's an exaggerated response far beyond the merits of the situation. It's a heart attack waiting to happen.

The family of vindictiveness, spitefulness, bitterness and vengefulness are perhaps misleading in appearances. The bitter person often feels justified to hold onto their position because they believe their target deserves their contempt. However, holding a grudge, stewing on blame and fault-finding, simmering in self-righteousness and narrow-focused judgments, poison the container.

Sarcasm is anger with a smile.

One of the leading causes of depression is nice-ism. When people bury their needs and wants in order to be a nice person and please others, it's called nice-ism. This is anger denied and internalized in order to look like a superior person. Nice-ism has been known to fester into many kinds of cancer.

Ruminating, brooding and stewing go around and around without any movement, change or relief, and people become increasingly stuck, focusing on the very thing that initiated their fury in the first place.

The ultimate unhealthy anger is rage. Rage is loud, ugly and no more than a temper tantrum. I think there are two kinds of rage. The rage of control and the rage of feeling threatened; both are very different.

The anger of entitlement belongs to aggressive-thinking and controlling people. Their objective is to be right, to be the center, to be the most important. The lack of empathy... the ability to connect with another human being at an intimately emotional level (to be able to identify their emotions and compassionately understand their viewpoint), provides fertile ground for the prerogative of rage. It's difficult, maybe impossible, to continue to entertain rage side by side with empathy. The anger of entitlement is a very lonely place.

The other rage is an explosive reaction to a perceived threat. Even though this is usually instigated from inner shame, the threatened person interprets it as a threat made by another person, often a loved one who is about to withhold something.

The difference in these two rages is the threatened angry person feels lingering despair over their behaviour afterwards while the controlling person continues to feel they are indeed justified.

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3) About Michele  
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Michele Crawford is a therapist who assists individuals who are struggling with trauma, anxiety or depression. Her passion for her work remains embedded in being able to connect with you in your suffering, helping you find real solutions no matter how complex the issue may be.

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4) Counselling Services  
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Are you prepared to live with more happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope? If your answer is "yes," then your next step is to contact me for a free 20-minute phone consultation. We can then discuss how I might best help you resolve your problems of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety.

The benefits of counselling with Michele include: significantly reduced stress levels, an optimistic outlook in life, increased confidence and hope.

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I want to reassure you that your e-mail address will never be shared or sold to anyone else.

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Pass It Along

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