



ANGER:

The Misunderstood Request

By Bill Mills

Leaders do not come in all shapes and sizes. Leaders come in only one classification: human.

Humans get angry, and leaders need to understand it, what causes it and how to move beyond it. You may be surprised to learn, as I was, that anger is not a primary emotion. It is a secondary emotion. What that means is underlying the emotion of anger, is a deeper emotion called fear. Anger is the fight or flight response to the primary emotion of fear.

Sadly, fear mongering has become a national pastime in America and it's time for leaders to address it. So please take a moment with me, and let's examine anger with the purpose of understanding the request hidden in angry behavior, so we can lead ourselves and others out of it.

Each of us have values. A value is simply a belief that affirms the believer. Most everyone values truth. We feel affirmed when we tell the truth and when people tell it to us. Not everyone, however, has the same set of values or the same hierarchy of values, and we often have different standards for the same values. For example, some people's standard for truth telling, is to speak up in the moment to the person who can do something about it. Others take their truth telling to social media.

Fear comes into play when we feel our values (affirming beliefs) are threatened. When my values are judged by others to be wrong or when my standards are violated, I'm likely to experience two types of fear. The fear of rejection is a fear I often call the fear of death. In death, it's all over. The fear of social death looks like rejection, abandonment, shunning, betrayal, isolation and embarrassment. It threatens our sense of self-worth. In a business setting my fear of rejection can prevent me from speaking up in meetings, or make me angry when I feel my ideas are dismissed.

The second type of fear is the fear of constraint which I call the fear of dying. Fear of dying is the fear of losing your capabilities. Where fear of death might be the fear of hitting the earth when your parachute fails to open, fear of dying is the fear of the fall itself and the loss of abilities to control your life. The fear of dying looks like fear of loss of freedom, loss of strength, feeling trapped, restricted and constrained. In a business setting my fear of being constrained might cause me to resist accountability, or make me angry when I'm told "no."

When people experience fear they rarely say, "I'm afraid." Instead, fear turns quickly and un-

consciously into anger and they complain about that “stupid decision” or that “stupid policy.” Once angry, they say and do things that activates fear and anger in others. The anger-death spiral appears to have no end to it until we remember it is rooted in fear.

When you were little, and you were afraid, what did you want? My kids wanted to be comforted. They wanted to feel understood and accepted. They wanted to feel forgiven, supported and loved. In a business setting we also want to be accepted and understood but it looks more like safety. We want to feel safe speaking up and taking risks. When our values or standards are threatened, anger shows up to protect us.

Anger is a request for understanding, acceptance, safety and support.

When we recognize this as leaders, as humans, and we offer acceptance and support to one another we quickly move to understanding and forgiveness. In this emotional space two people naturally start to see opportunity and synergistic ways to create a more satisfying future together.

When we're angry we rarely have the wherewithal to realize we're frightened let alone know how to ask for acceptance and support. When someone else is angry, it can be equally difficult to realize they are afraid and we need to offer them a safe place to talk about the values and standards that may have been threatened. And yet, this is the higher calling of the leader, to sow peace where there is fear and anger. In 2017, please be the leader who leads people out of fear. Happy Holidays, all!

Bill Mills is the CEO of Executive Group, a CEO and leadership peer group grounded in proven processes for success. Visit www.mnexecutivegroup.com to learn more. To purchase his book, “The Power of Conscious Conversation,” send an email to Bill at bill@mnexecutivegroup.com.

A photograph of Lisa Lamm Bachman, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a teal top and a pearl necklace. She is looking down at a document on a desk, holding a pen. The image is partially obscured by text overlays.

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