

HOT TOPICS

“ANGER MANAGEMENT”

By Suzanne Alawa

Took a show of hands for the people in the room who have been threatened.

Took a show of hands for the people in the room who have been attacked.

Have you ever thought about the difference between anger and hostility? Anger is a natural tool used for setting boundaries, i.e. I step on your foot, you get angry and say “get off”, once it’s handled, the issue is done and over, short-lived. Hostility, however is not short-lived, it can last a lifetime. The difference between anger and hostility is that hostility always intends harm. It can be active or passive, but someone is going to get you one way or another, whether you know it or not.

You can negotiate with an angry person if you clearly communicate, educate and respect that person with the need for more information. You cannot communicate with a hostile person no matter how hard you try to be nice. The nicer you are, the more hostile they become.

And for your own safety, never tell a hostile person to “calm down”, they will do the **exact opposite** and they can become a danger to themselves and to others, including you. It is vital to discern their disposition as soon as you can (angry or hostile). It is at this point that you can quietly and sincerely ask them for their help. Doing so often gets them off their guard and some actually do calm down. It doesn’t work for every situation, but it is well worth a try.

Many people are under enormous stress financially, in traffic, at home or work. When they get home, they want to turn it all off for a while. That is where they go to get away from it all, their sanctuary, their ‘castle’. The letter they get in the mail, the one you wrote so well, that courtesy call on their recorder; that is all that is needed to set them off. They make it a crusade to find you and “straighten you out”, after all they pay your salary!

Remember, WE are the people that they want to get away from when they get home. People under stress take things very personally, especially about their homes, their kids or their dog. Think about it, the most mild mannered person can become upset when you tell them that the pile of tires on the side of their house must go or that the political sign in the window must be removed or their dog is pooping in neighbor’s yards. They can turn downright vicious toward you. Unreasonable? Yes. Normal? Yes.

Remember how you feel when you go home and you will better empathize with the people who don’t like the rules, and don’t like that you have to enforce them. Keep that in mind and you will treat them how you want to be treated when you go home.

Be acutely aware of where and how you meet with people, and have a backup plan so you won’t place yourself in harm’s way. View your workplace, offices, meeting places and rate them for safety. Do you or your staff work alone? Is there a rear exit? Where are the exits? Is there a security guard? Is there a panic button? Do you or your staff have tools like pepper spray or an aerosol horn? Do they know how to use them? Your disaster preparedness plan should include the safety of people in meetings and methods of preventing violence against board members or staff.

Talk about it often with your team, prepare for it and hope it never happens. People are our greatest assets and we all need to safeguard our volunteers and staff.