

# Lifting the Veil on Anger



Perhaps anger is covering up something deeper. Like not owning the right to choose.

**By Melanie DewBerry-Jones**

**T**he other day one of my “challenging clients” and I were debating the appropriateness of anger. While maintaining my perspective, I was also enjoying listening to his commitment to anger. My client felt that his outrage at the often-shabby treatment of lower-income people moved him into action and, therefore, anger served a valiant purpose in his life. “Good argument,” I conceded, “but not good enough.” After twenty minutes of getting nowhere, we agreed to both be right and return to the coaching.

In the moment I knew that the coaching had gone south, I had become hooked on “being right” with a capital “H.” I allowed my agenda to override my commitment to the coaching relationship. What I realized in that moment was how the power of anger—no matter how lofty the intent—seduces us into accepting fear’s lowest common denominator. I had attached to being right, and like being angry, it is a short-term solution and a way of camouflaging our agendas. When we are so committed to being right, we are often blanketing our anger.

I do have to concede however, that anger can serve a purpose; first it tells us something needs a deeper focus. Secondly, for those who are learning to own their power, anger is often an important flag in recognizing it’s time to honor boundaries, their voice, and their freedom to be self expressed. When we allow

anger to be more of a resource center, that calls to look within informing us of a deeper truth, rather than a command center that compels us to react, we can be served well by our anger. Although I have come to believe that anger never is the right answer, I found myself cutting off my client instead of inviting him in. What did being right and being angry have in common? When we dare to lift the carpet of anger, we never find our joys waiting for us with outstretched arms; instead, we find our fears cowering from the light of introspection. Mirror, mirror on the wall who is the most right of all?

Often, fear is desire turned on its head. When we fear that the desired object will be denied us, we manipulate our fear into anger for the socially acceptable reason that showing anger is preferable to showing fear. The agreed upon planetary perception is that when we admit to being afraid, we wimp out—we make ourselves vulnerable. So we use anger to maneuver others into getting what we want.

We use anger as our ace in the hole because it creates distance so that others cannot see, smell or touch our fear. Anger is the response of the powerless. Children become angry because they are dependent on adults for their survival—they are literally fighting for their lives. Even adults, who have choices, sometimes



remain fixated on the anger response because they have not owned their independence and right to choose. The following scenarios demonstrate this:

**The “withholding” scenario.** Your mate won’t pick up after him/herself. You withhold sex, affection, and open communication to get what you want. Or you yell or discuss the situation ad nauseam and wear him/her down until you win.

**The “make wrong” scenario.** Your boss makes you angry. How much energy do you spend making him/her wrong with others? Notice how the more wrong you make your boss, the more justified and right you feel.

**The “I’ll reject you before you reject me” scenario.** A friend doesn’t give what you consider enough time to your relationship. You retaliate by creating reasons to distance yourself from it. How many relationships have you abandoned so you didn’t have to feel rejected? No matter, you win and that is what matters!

Many angry people don’t have anger management problems; they have intimacy issues. Intimacy entails openness with self and others. Intimacy allows us to expose our fears and receive healing. Anger signals our unwillingness to be intimate with ourselves. Anger alienates. It puts us in defense mode and redirects our resources away from what would bring us joy and love.

I don’t recall being an angry child or young woman. Yet, when I searched my memory, scalding events began to attach themselves to each other until I awoke one morning, in my thirtieth year, buried in an avalanche of pent up anger. All the equality I had been promised, the dreams I had been assured of, and the love I was owed in exchange for my hard work had eluded my grasp. And was I pissed off about it! From that moment on, real joy became a thing of the past; my anger became my shadow. It assured me: Wherever you go, there I shall be also.

Life always gives us what we desire. So when we look for evidence about how unfair life is, we get plenty of evidence to support our perspectives. The surer I became that life was hard, the more afraid I became. Around every corner lay unending opportunities for me to do battle with the injustice that I expected to encounter. I was right, but was I miserable! The course in miracles asks it well “which do you want more to be right or to be happy?”

I looked for and found plenty of outlets for my anger. I embraced opportunities to explode on humanity, including, sadly, most of my dearest friends. I also became active in my community by sitting on the boards of many non-profit organizations. I accomplished many wonderful things with my anger, such as co-creating the first youth credit union in Northern California for low-income immigrants. But, with all my fear-driven success, I was ultimately causing and experiencing a lot of pain because I could not admit that I was afraid.

Using racism, I cloaked my fear in anger. Who was going to argue with a Black woman about the tyranny of racism? No one. This became my new armor. As long as I could keep people at a distance I felt safe and in control; but that was a false sense of security. The distance created deep pain that I was unwilling to tap into

and resolve. It became far easier to project my pain onto everyone else.

When coaching, I try to remember that anger is not an emotion to ignore or step over. It is not a “bad” emotion; it is just the voice of our pain. Typically, we get stuck in anger and react from it. Anger then becomes a world unto itself. What is important to remember is not to be fooled by giving into it. Recall an instance when someone else’s anger pushed your buttons and, before you knew it, you were either saying or doing something childish that you later regretted or had to work very hard to justify. Engaging anger holds us hostage to the emotion. But when we give anger space by staying curious about it, something deeper emerges for the client and coach to work with.

As coaches, we must look inside, underneath and all around to see what the anger is trying to show us. We encourage our clients to stay present to the anger without succumbing to it. When we work with our clients in discovering the true agenda, they can learn to respond to that agenda instead of reacting to the anger.

Anger doesn’t resolve any issues because it almost never is about the surface problem. Untreated, anger creates the “dis-ease” that contaminates all our rela-

**“When we give anger space by staying curious about it, something deeper emerges for the client and coach.”**

tionships. It is usually a cover for fear; fear that we will not be loved unconditionally. When we use anger to get what we want it is a “get” that is stolen rather than freely given. Unable to trust that we can get what we want without the force of anger we rob ourselves of the opportunity for others to engage with us and give to us freely. It wounds us while desensitizing us to the suffering of self and others.

Anger is a toxic lie waiting to be unearthed, healed and released.

Although I cannot give you a foolproof technique that will help your coaching, I can, however, share with you my experience of the healing power of acceptance. When anger was still feasting on my soul, I was taking a coaching course taught by two dyna-

mite coaches. Anger ridden as I was at that time, I found opportunities to find them wrong, complain and dare anyone to argue with me. What I noticed was neither of them ever challenged me, got angry with me or demanded that I be any different. Believe me, I looked for the catch, but could find none. For the first time I started to feel accepted, and this helped me to stop feeding my anger. They listened at the soul level. I felt heard not deterred. Their radical act of acceptance created space for my fear to surface.

Another morning, towards the end of my thirties, I woke up thinking: Today, I can choose to be a free Black woman, where racism may exist, but I exist differently with it. Today, I can believe that the world loves me, wants to play with me, and can’t wait to interact with me. By allowing my fear to expose itself, those wise coaches gently allowed me to choose to be coached into something more—a life by design instead of a life by default. By the end of the course, I was sitting in a room basking in the acceptance my soul craved. We are not so different—you, me and our clients. Love and acceptance are what we all desire. In fact, my Native American elders say, “*Mitakuye Oyasin*,” which means, “We are all related.” The client’s pain is

our pain. Allowing ourselves to lean into the pain and the fear, being open to feeling it unlocks the door to our acceptance of it.

When our clients bring us anger issues, it is almost always a red herring. There is often something beneath the surface that lies at the heart of the issue. It is our job as coaches to fish up that invisible something, giving it and the client room to breathe and transform. Coach the human not the anger. In the face of anger our best skill is using the salve of compassion.

When anger rides in on your clients, here are a few crucial things to remember:

- Remember it is covering up something deeper.
- Allow the anger the space it needs, and invite it to drop its mask.



- Love your clients as they are; let them be who they are in this moment.
- See the beauty in the client no matter who they are showing up as.
- Be curious.

Ask the following questions:

- What is hurting right now?
- Does being angry get you what you want and make you happy?
- When the anger is gone, what are you left with?

Finally, don't forget to check in the mirror, because our clients always show up with exactly the same issues we have as coaches. Should you find yourself with an angry client, it's time to look under your anger carpet, too. One of the most wonderful gifts of coaching is

having our reality mirrored back to us! You can be sure my client sent me on my own treasure hunt.

Together, clients and coaches have the power to choose to *radically* transform and liberate their deepest anger and fear into acceptance. When we expand our hearts—by seeing our client's highest self, no matter who is on the call, asking powerful questions, and, yes, adding a dollop of love— a spiritual alchemy occurs. Without the shackles of anger, our clients have the power to free up and redirect the resources previously held hostage in the defensiveness of anger to the greater good of claiming a joyous life. •

---

Melanie DewBerry-Jones is a twice-certified coach and a senior trainer for the Coaches Training Institute. Melanie is a speaker, storyteller and a member of the National Speakers Association.



**G**rowth is vital. As a strong independent businesswoman you know that the best, most rewarding growth takes place when you know what you want, and are supported in getting it.

**T**hat's where coaching comes in. Garry Schleifer of Words2Action helps you focus on the professional, personal, or business growth that you're most interested in.

So call Garry at **Words2Action** today and grow!

# Grow!

**In your profession  
In your business.  
In your life.**

**Words2Action** Garry Schleifer CPCC, CDC™

Tel: 416.925.6643 • Fax: 416.925.3026

garry@words2action.com • [www.words2action.com](http://www.words2action.com)

