

## The Model in Clinical Action

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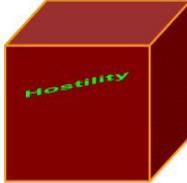
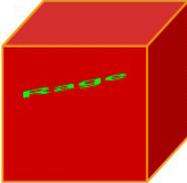
The Stress Doc provides a vignette illustrating how a client-employee let go of rage and hostility with his harshly critical manager. Grieving and working through unresolved family of origin and "authority" issues is the impetus for a rapid learning curve, an effective plan and personal maturation.

### The "Volatile-Victim" Employee and the Belligerent-Impaired Manager

*"How to" Transform Rage into an Assertive Plan*

For a good part of the last decades I've shared my "Four Faces of Anger" Model with a wide variety of live audiences. As previously outlined ("The Four Faces of Anger," *Treatment Today*, 1997; or email stressdoc@aol.com) the model differentiates the general concept of anger by using two broad dimensions: whether a person's anger expression is "constructive or destructive" and whether it's "purposeful or spontaneous." These distinctions yield a 2x2 or four-box matrix:

#### Four Faces of Anger Model

	Constructive	Destructive
Purposeful		
Spontaneous		

And on stage, the model really comes to life. Program participants' eyes and minds seem to open wide upon realizing that anger is not a one-dimensional concept, that it can have a different "face" based on the psychological state of the communicator. (And even those mental health professionals having a more sophisticated understanding of anger appreciate the model's educational and clinical potential.) Having four faces to work with, lay audiences are now better able to visualize and grasp this emotionally charged state both conceptually as well as interpersonally. With the realization that anger can be

- a) constructive – displaying "assertion" or "passion" faces
- b) destructive – displaying "hostility" or "rage" faces

People see the potential for having more emotional and communicational options; for being more in control of these charged feelings and also for feeling less guilt-ridden. Anger is not reflexively "bad" or an intrinsic sign of weakness. And anger is no longer so amorphous; there is a clearer sense of choice in self-defining and self-expressing your anger state. However, this awareness of choice poses problems: you are now challenged to move beyond your familiar if not habitual anger patterns. Now that anger is no longer "all or none" – explosive or silent seething – you are responsible for the nature of your anger expression, whether "purposeful" or, even, "spontaneous".

Taking on a more mature face, that is, positively modifying your anger expression, may require grappling with an additional polar dimension – the connections between your internalized past and your real and psychological present. You must also have a gut understanding of how this interaction influences your sense of self and how it impacts your capacity for communicating with significant (often perceived as powerful) others. And, invariably, significant change processes involve some growing pains grieving of unfinished emotional attachments and psychological independence.

### The Hutch Story

To address and integrate these various pieces of the anger puzzle, I will share a clinical vignette. This instructive tale involves a bright, emotionally intense, fairly tall and well-built married man in his mid-30s. I'll call him Hutch. His sister-in-law, a former client of mine, referred Hutch. Until recently, Hutch had been a quasi-manager at a car dealership. In the mid-1980s, the economy of New Orleans was stagnant. I was not surprised to hear that a dealership division head had asked Hutch to troubleshoot in another department. Hutch was to work under a manager whose department was having performance difficulties. Considerably older than Hutch, this manager was not as sharp as our protagonist. (He didn't think as fast and tended to downplay or overlook potential errors.) And this problematic manager also had a drinking problem that upper management was not addressing. (As a Washington, DC stress consultant, when sharing with folks that I previously lived in New Orleans the first response is predictable: "Guess you had to move to DC to find stressed out folks." My reply: "Yeah, in the Big Easy they don't have stress...just alcohol and 'go cups!'").

Returning to our story, how do you think this manager feels about Hutch trouble shooting in his department? It's pretty obvious...he feels *THREATENED!* But he's not the only one upset. As he shares his tale of woe, Hutch's voice is getting louder and louder and his face is turning red; his body language faithfully portrays his state of agitation. Hutch declares: "It's not fair. I'm trying to help this guy and all he does is put me down; he dismisses what I have to say or he ignores me." Hutch's voice and body continue to shake. Is Hutch a candidate for *volcanus eruptus*?

### Analysis and Initial Intervention

Let's step back for a moment and do some analysis using "The Four Faces of Anger" Model. Can we say that Hutch is in a rage state or, at least, potentially building up toward one? I say yes. The clues: his becoming increasingly loud and agitated, as well as his self-righteous rant about feeling like a victim. Might this scenario have potential for workplace violence? I certainly could not dismiss such a possibility.

I wanted to break into Hutch's victim/vicious anger cycle. After mostly listening for a while, I tried intervening with logic, which went nowhere. Starting to feel exasperated with Hutch's one-sided righteous rambling, I challenged him: "Let me ask you, Hutch. If a six-year-old came up to you and said, 'Mr. Hutch, you're not a very good manager, what would you do?'" Hutch immediately pointed to a nearby chair and loudly declared: "I'd sit this six-year-old down and I'd convince him that I'm a good manager." At first startled by Hutch's defensive response, I finally countered: "Hutch are you telling me that you would have to justify yourself as a manager with a six-year-old?" Hutch now stopped growling, paused, grimaced and then slapped his forehead and reluctantly shared, if not sneered, "I get your point, Mark".

Well Hutch went away, and frankly I wasn't sure what state he was in. One thing, though, seemed apparent: Hutch had a strong need for this manager's recognition if not approval.

A week later Hutch returned and he was in a much better mood. My opening: "What's going on, Hutch?" Hutch's immediate reply: "Mark, it's a good thing I have vivid powers of imagination. Cause I saw this jerk in diapers, throwing temper tantrums...I've been laughing at him all day".

Obviously, Hutch's overt demeanor has changed. But in what way has his attitude and behavior specifically changed? Actually, Hutch has done a psychological 180-degree turnaround. Whereas before he was feeling put down and was coming across like an enraged child-like victim (speaking of "throwing temper tantrums"), now Hutch feels superior to this "two-year-old" manager.

While not feeling any pain, Hutch's smug attitude unfortunately provides a false sense of security and superiority. Can you go around laughing at your boss all day, or even be smirking continuously behind his back? Surely not. Remember, a lot more folks shoot themselves in the foot than "go postal".

However, all is not negative. If we go back to the "Four Faces" Model, Hutch is demonstrating some progress. The use of psychological judo has Hutch more in control of his emotions. However, his smirking and condescending posture definitely has serious dysfunctional elements. In fact, I would locate Hutch in the "purposeful-destructive" quadrant. His face clearly projects "hostility" or, to be precise, Hutch is exhibiting "hostile humor".

So, while Hutch is self-satisfied, I'm not. Again, I'm pretty sure Hutch will self-destruct if his sarcastic attitude and mannerisms are not defused. And there's another reason, perhaps the most important reason, for more counseling. As a therapist, it's against my code of ethics to allow anyone to get too well too fast.

### Deeper Intervention

Returning to our initial session, I ask Hutch if he had ever felt that kind of rage before (a rage that was out of proportion to the offense). Becoming reflective, Hutch answers: "Well, my parents used to have these screaming fights, and my mother had a way of putting down my father that drove me nuts. And if I'm honest, my old man had a drinking problem".

Bingo! Is all of Hutch's rage due to this problematic manager? Of course not. There are three streams of aggression released by:

- a) his parents fighting and the put downs
- b) his father's drinking

Let me embellish here. We know if someone in a family is drinking or drugging most everyone is walking on egg, if not egg, shells. Who's coming home, the loving father or the father who will knock you upside the head if you look at him the wrong way? An atmosphere of uncertainty, tension and threat of aggression often produces family members sensitive to rejection and struggling with feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness. And the third stream

c) The defensively caustic, alcohol-addled manager. And these three streams are rushing together to form Hutch's "river of rage." And not surprisingly, Hutch's childhood conflicts are now mirrored in the criticism and alcoholism of his manager (a symbolic parental "authority"). It seems likely that on some level Hutch unconsciously needs the approval of his critical and withholding manager. This psychological dynamic may well reflect unresolved issues for Hutch regarding his status or worthiness in the eyes of his father and/or mother.

I confront Hutch with the psychological reality that his initial rage reaction (and even current sarcasm) involves more than his workplace antagonist. Hutch is taking my words in without his previous defensive bluster. He needs to do some therapy work, that is, some "head work, heart work and homework".

And Hutch seems ready to explore some deeper feelings and conflicted issues. This readiness is related to Hutch's regaining momentary control, both of his emotions and the status of the relationship, through the use of hostile humor. And while his sense of superiority has a defensive function, there's a positive aspect: when a person is in a rage or near-rage state he or she is usually not able to examine painful conscious and unconscious sources of charged emotions. This would be moving too fast and pushing too deep. The individual is too vulnerable to risk giving up psychic control. However, in a crisis or emotionally vulnerable state, many times a person will fairly rapidly allow himself or herself to be dependent on a figure they perceive as trustworthy. The client hopes for some mind-body relief and structure as well as a tangible behavior-goal path; there's a compelling need to regain more confident control of his emotions and of the stressful environment.

Hutch and I connected on this level; we didn't need long-term analysis for this intervention. (The goal was not profound personality change.) Within three or four sessions, using brief therapy, cognitive-behavioral and educational techniques, Hutch began to understand and connect past family dynamics and pain with his present victim-victor mentality and volatility.

### The Passionate Turning Point and Rational Teaching Points

After about a month, Hutch comes to my office and firmly declares: "I've had it! Mark, I tried talking to this guy (notice no longer a "jerk") rationally, to see if we could at least establish a working relationship. He didn't want to listen to at all. Hey, I've had enough. I'm going to the division head. We are going to have a three way. This situation is over." And in fact, Hutch was true to his word. Soon thereafter he spoke clearly and firmly with the division head. Hutch was temporarily reassigned; eventually he replaced the troubled manager.

First, let's analyze this last outpouring in my office, especially Hutch's initial, spontaneous declaration: "I've had it!" Drawing on the anger model, Hutch was running on passionate energy and belief. ("Passion" is the "constructive-spontaneous" face). Many folks are surprised to discover that "passion" has definitional roots in the word "suffering," as in the "Passion Play" or the "sufferings of Jesus." And at this point Hutch's passion is fueled by two sources:

- a) The pain of the relationship with his manager and the frustration that he alone cannot influence this manager's dysfunctional behavior; up until this moment Hutch had not been ready to concede defeat and seek redress from the division head and
- b) The pain associated with family of origin dynamics; having honestly faced some of this pain in therapy helps temper the aggressive workplace reaction while simultaneously pushing for constructive and focused action.

Out of the spontaneous state of passion emerges a "purposeful" plan. His decision to talk with the division head means Hutch has let go of independently trying to change his antagonist. It also likely signifies that Hutch has given up trying to get some recognition or approval from this critical and dysfunctional manager. And having done his head work, heart work and homework, Hutch has also been able to tone down the critical inner parental/authority voices.

To recapitulate: The courage to face honestly and fully your pain is often the foundation for purposeful problem solving and assertive action.

The purpose of sharing this vignette is three threefold:

- 1) using case application and analysis, to bring to life “the Four Faces of Anger” Model
- 2) illustrating and applying the model as an intervention tool, i.e., helping an enraged individual gain control, constructively confront past and present pain and release vital passion which fuels assertive action
- 3) building on the second point, to identify the unstated psychological concepts that infused my work with Hutch, that helped him “let go” – “grief” and the “grief process”.

### The Liberating Intervention Concept

Now, let’s analyze our “transforming rage to assertion” scenario using the Stages of Grief:

**1. Shock and/or Denial:** Hutch was likely surprised when the division head asked him to troubleshoot in another department. A state of shock likely hit upon receiving a belligerent reception. And Hutch’s expectation that his problematic manager would eventually be reasonable, appreciative or would validate his problem-solving efforts bordered on denial, in light of the manager’s substance abuse issues.

**2. Confusion and Helplessness:** A highly competent, “let’s get it done” employee, Hutch (let’s call him an irresistible force) was confronted by an immovable and dysfunctional individual. Hutch’s belief in a playing field of hard work, subsequent reward and fairness was being threatened. He was at a loss. And in his first session, Hutch wavered between helplessness and its potentially explosive complement - feeling out of control. (Children of alcoholics often have a low threshold for this emotional state).

**3. Loss of Control and Rage:** There is a close connection between Hutch’s feelings of helplessness and the perceived assault on his sense competence and fairness and the reactive volatile-victim behavior. The rage is double-edged: it’s fired by a sense of injustice, albeit exaggerated, and his rage is an immature smoke screen for his vulnerability.

**4. Ambivalence and Hostility:** Hutch was able to regain some control through his hostile humor imagery. Though in reality fairly tenuous, this sense of control allowed Hutch to risk doing some deeper “head work, heart work and homework.” On some level, Hutch knew his smirking strategy could not last.

I suspect Hutch also had some ambivalence about going to the division head early on; he wanted to demonstrate he could handle a tough situation. His feeling stuck also involved wanting recognition from an authority.

**5. Genuine Pain – Past and Present:** Intense distress pushed Hutch to allow me to help him integrate past and present conflicts and raw emotions. This enabled him to understand the sources of pain and to transform his “suffering”: rage and hostility were now converted to a purer passion.

**6. Focused Anger and Letting Go:** “I’ve had it!” passion was quickly converted into a constructive plan – a three-way conference. (An option always available; Hutch had to be ready to seize it.) Hutch was now less dependent on making things work with this problematic manager; he did not need his approval. Nor was Hutch concerned about the division head judging him negatively for the failed experiment.

**7. Acceptance:** More than the ultimate promotion, Hutch’s acceptance was manifested in a richer and more honest understanding of his own sense of self and his early family dynamics. His ability to “let go” of the dysfunctional interaction was a tangible sign of maturation. While the experiment had been quite frustrating and painful, there was a silver lining: the opportunity for therapeutic support, greater self-understanding and healthier relating with “authority” figures (along with, of course, an eventual promotion). Hutch now believed the entire experience – negative and positive – had helped him mature personally and professionally.

## Closing

An understanding of “The Four Faces of Anger” Model means you have a better grasp of the destructive and constructive nature of anger as well as the model’s diagnostic and therapeutic potential. The model is a resource for helping yourself and others transform “rage” and “hostility” into “passion” and “assertion.” And by bringing both emotional intelligence and expressive-intelligence into the arena of anger interaction and intervention you have expanded your ability and the ability of others to....*Practice Safe Stress!*

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**Mark Gorkin, MSW, LICSW, “The Stress Doc”™**, a nationally acclaimed speaker, writer, and “Psychohumorist”™, and a Visiting Leadership Coach/Training Consultant for the international Embry-Riddle Aeronautics University/Daytona, FL headquarters. Mark is a founding partner and Stress Resilience and Trauma Debriefing Consultant for the Nepali Diaspora Mental Health & Well advocacy group, Be Well Initiative. A former Stress and Violence Prevention Consultant for the US Postal Service, he has led numerous Pre-Deployment Stress Resilience-Humor-Team Building Retreats for the US Army. Presently Mark does Critical Incident Debriefing for organizational/corporate clients of Business Health Services. The Doc is the author of *Practice Safe Stress*, *The Four Faces of Anger*, and *Preserving Human Touch in a High-Tech World*. Mark’s award-winning, *USA Today Online “HotSite”* – [www.stressdoc.com](http://www.stressdoc.com) – was called a “workplace resource” by National Public Radio (NPR). For more info, email: [stressdoc@aol.com](mailto:stressdoc@aol.com).

## The Four Faces of Anger: Model and Method

*Transforming Hostility and Rage into Assertion and Passion*

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## Reader Testimonials

My anger

From: regdb@

My reason for writing to you is this: I think you are right about constructive vs. destructive anger or, purposeful vs. spontaneous anger. I have extrapolated from your examples a better way for me to handle my own anger, that is, to be constructive and purposeful. I will add what I learned from you to what I know of myself and let you know what the deal is later on. You may expect a letter from me in two or three weeks. In the mean time, if you have any insight, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you for your time, doc. Best wishes,

Reginald D

Just a quick note to let you know that I got the book and find that it contains wise and constructive advice.

I have thought about the strategic position that I must take to avoid becoming upset. I find that the part about thinking through the response reaction versus just “reacting” is crucial. This is very important to me because since the chemistry is really not right, my personal feelings towards this individual have been influencing how I feel. Who can work with that type of stress and turmoil? However, there is light because awareness of this and the need to look at things calmly and objectively is taking place within me. This will help with the response and less emotional defensive reaction that I have been giving. Thank you. God bless you,

Maria R

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### **The Four Faces of Anger: Model and Method**

*Transforming Hostility and Rage  
Into Assertion and Passion*

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