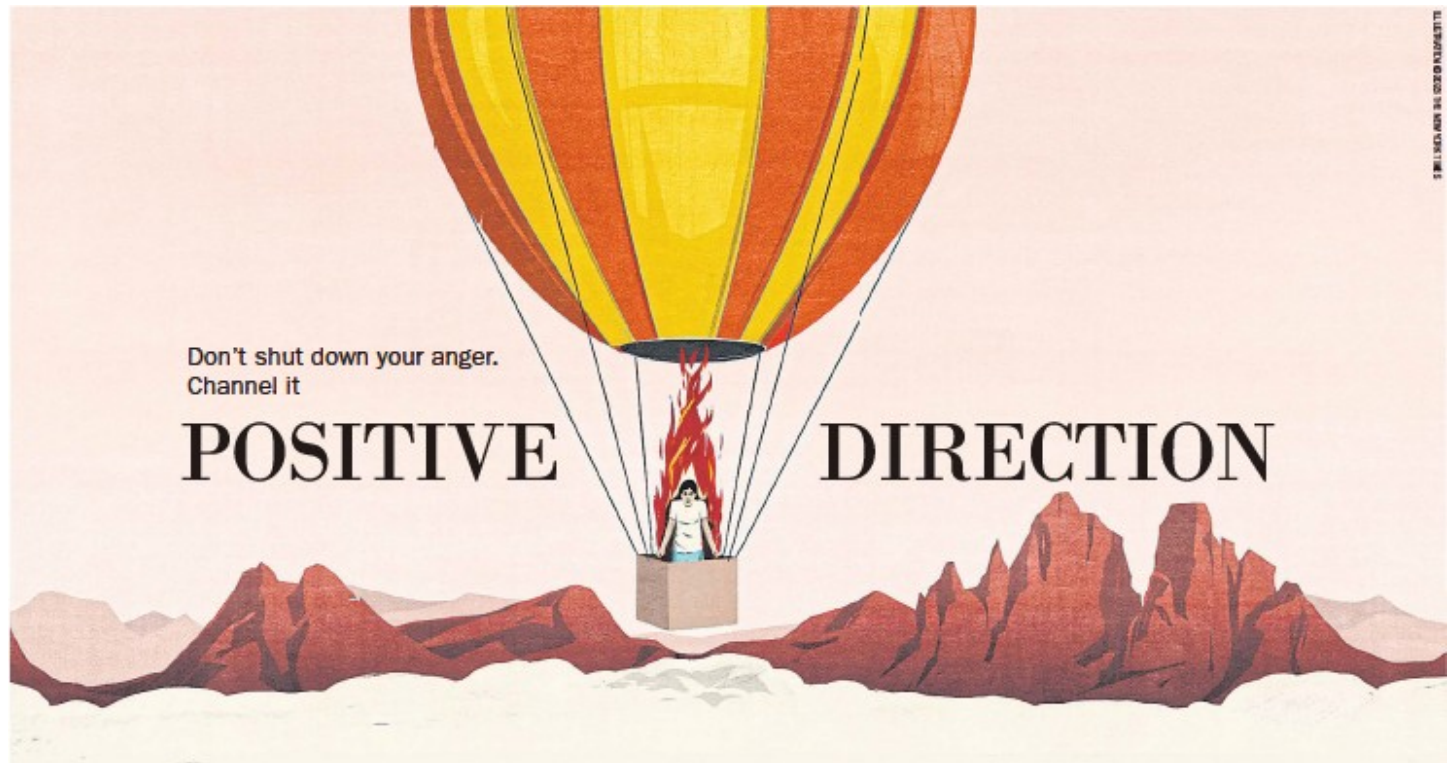


HOW TO COPE WITH ANGER

Don't shut down your anger. Channel it

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There is an upside to feeling angry. According to research published recently in *The Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, anger is more helpful at motivating people to overcome obstacles and meet goals than a neutral emotional state.

In a series of seven experiments, researchers recruited undergraduate students at Texas A&M University and, in some cases, elicited anger by showing the students images that insulted their school, such as people in Aggie shirts wearing diapers and carrying baby bottles.

“It worked well,” said Heather C. Lench, the lead author of the study and a professor in the psychological and brain sciences department at Texas A&M.

The researchers found that anger helped the students solve more puzzles. When they were asked to play a computer game rigged to be nearly impossible to win, this angered them. But in those moments, the students moved faster and their reaction time decreased. Other experiments also showed that anger could be beneficial.

“For a long time, there was this idea that being positive all the time was a life well lived, and that’s what we should strive for,” Lench said. “But there’s more and more evidence that it’s actually a life that’s balanced by a mix of emotions that seems to be more satisfying and positive long-term.”

EMBRACE YOUR ANGER

Many of us have been taught to push away our so-called negative emotions and focus on the positive. But experts say that being relentlessly positive and leaning on happy platitudes, also known as “toxic positivity”, can harm us.

“Most positivity lingo lacks nuance, compassion and curiosity,” therapist Whitney Goodman writes in her book

Toxic Positivity. “It comes in the form of blanket statements that tell someone how to feel and that the feeling they’re currently having is wrong.”

The truth is that all of our emotions can be useful.

“We evolved to experience negative emotions,” said Ethan Kross, a psychologist and the director of the Emotion and Self-Control Lab at the University of Michigan.

UNPACK YOUR ANGER

The first step is to recognise that you’re angry.

“It sounds so obvious, but it’s not,” said Daniel L. Shapiro, an associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital and the author of *Negotiating The Nonnegotiable*. Ask yourself, what am I feeling right now? What is this about?

“We get angry when we feel there’s an obstacle that is impeding us,” Shapiro said. Anger can also derive from emotions that shake us up, like shame, humiliation or the feeling of being unappreciated, or when we sense that our beliefs or values are under attack.

SET A HEALTHY GOAL

When anger surfaces, it is important to remember your overall goal. Otherwise, anger can quickly get out of control, producing an outsize response that is too intense for the circumstances or that lasts an inordinate amount of time.

Say you’re arguing with your spouse. Some studies have shown that expressing anger and having a confrontational discussion can improve the relationship, provided that your goal is to strengthen the relationship, express your needs or come to a compromise, Lench said. But if you mainly care about being right and winning the argument, then that could “lead you to be aggressive with them in a way that is harmful”, she added. To argue with someone constructively, Shapiro said, imagine what the other person is feeling and look at the problem through their eyes.

That doesn’t mean you need to agree. If your anger is all-consuming, first step away to cool down.

LEARN TO HARNESS ANGER AT WORK

In the workplace, you can channel angry energy to achieve performance-related goals. For example, someone who didn’t receive the annual review or promotion they wanted could use that anger to plan out steps to do better next year, said David Lebel, an associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh’s Katz Graduate School of Business.

And if you bring up a problem with your co-workers or your manager, couple it with a suggestion that would help solve the problem, he added, or ask for help in finding a solution.

FINALLY, BE WARY OF VENTING

Venting can feel good, but it doesn’t generally produce solutions, Kross said. Try to get social support from people who can be objective. © 2023 THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY