



Role of Communication Skills in Anger Management

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Apply the cycle of anger
- ✓ Understand Albert Bandura's behavior wheel and how it applies to anger
- ✓ Develop a seven-step process for managing your anger and others' anger
- ✓ Apply better communication and problem solving skills, which will reduce frustration and anger

Role of Communication and Problem Solving in Anger Management

Communicating Better

Building Your Message

The Importance of Communication Skills

Often people who are most angry are people who haven't developed their communication skills to the level they would like, and as a result they feel frustrated and misunderstood. Poor communication skills can actually contribute to their being repeatedly misunderstood, and improvements mean that they can express themselves better and be understood.

I Messages

We are most likely to retain the goodwill of the person we're standing up to if we stick with our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and avoid direct or implied criticism of the other person. One way to do that is to stick with "I" messages, expressed in a matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone of voice.

You Message	I Message
You talk too loudly.	I have sensitive hearing.
You should send out an agenda.	I'd like to know what we're going to discuss in the meeting tomorrow so I can bring the right information with me.

You can use this same type of message when you are giving feedback about someone else's behavior. Remember, the feedback needs to be non-judgmental, but it should be specific and direct.

The Assertiveness Formula

There is also a formula for assertiveness:

Step	Goal	Example
Step 1	Non-judgmentally describe a specific behavior of the other person.	When you...
Step 2	Describe, as specifically as possible, the effects this behavior is	The effects are...

	having, or the practical problems it is causing in your life.	
Step 3	Describe how you feel as a result, without using the expression, “you make me...”	I feel...
Step 4	Describe what you want, preferably after you give the other person a chance to state what they think might be done.	I prefer/would like...

Example: “When you leave your papers all over my office, it causes it to be cluttered and I feel disorganized and upset. I would like it if you could pick your papers up when you are done.”

When you are stating feelings, remember these tips:

- State feelings, not evaluations
- State feelings, not solutions
- State feelings directly

Test your knowledge

Rephrase the following statements using the four-step model.

You missed that deadline! I want to fire you right now!

You are late again. You’re always late, and making me look bad!

Asking Questions

Questioning Skills

The right questions provide structure to your conversation. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ask one question at a time, instead of trying to get to everything at once.
- Phrase the question in simple, easily understandable words and terms that don't intimidate your conversation partner.
- Keep your questions brief. Questions that are more than two sentences in length are too long; break them up and ask them as two or more questions.
- Keep your phrasing positive. Reframe negative questions to make them more positive, which will encourage conversation.
- Use open questions to get more information, rather than relying on closed questions.
- Follow up on incomplete answers by probing for more information.

Planning Your Questions

You can plan for the conversation ahead of time and decide what kind of question to ask depending on what your goals are. You can design your questions to help you with any of the following:

- Get information
- Gain consensus
- Focus conversations
- Begin closing the conversation
- Gather opinion

It is helpful to have some good questions ready that relate to the conversation that you are planning.

List some examples of good questions.

Three Keys

There are three keys you can use to frame your conversation in the best way possible.

Intent

Set your conversation up in the best way possible by giving other people the benefit of the doubt. This means that you assume that their problem behavior or attitude was not their goal, and that they are approaching things with positive intent.

If you fail to give credit to them for having positive intent, you may inadvertently set a conversation off track and contribute to the other person becoming defensive or angry.

Identifying Criteria

Criteria and expectations are important, and they are things that you are measuring during an interaction. You use them to decide whether an idea is good or not, and to set up benchmarks. These criteria become even more important when different points of view are creating a problem between two people, or workplace teams, and so on. Salaries, job security, and engagement are some of the things that commonly create problems in the workplace. If you are finding that a conversation is going off track, try to figure out why the others in your conversation are supporting or coming out against something. Then you can problem solve and generate solutions that meet a suitable arrangement for both of you.

Non-Verbal Expressions

Whether you are someone with a tendency to frown or smile has a big effect on the direction of a conversation. Are you aware of what your body language says about you?

Basic Problem Solving Tools

The Three-Phase Model

About Problem Solving

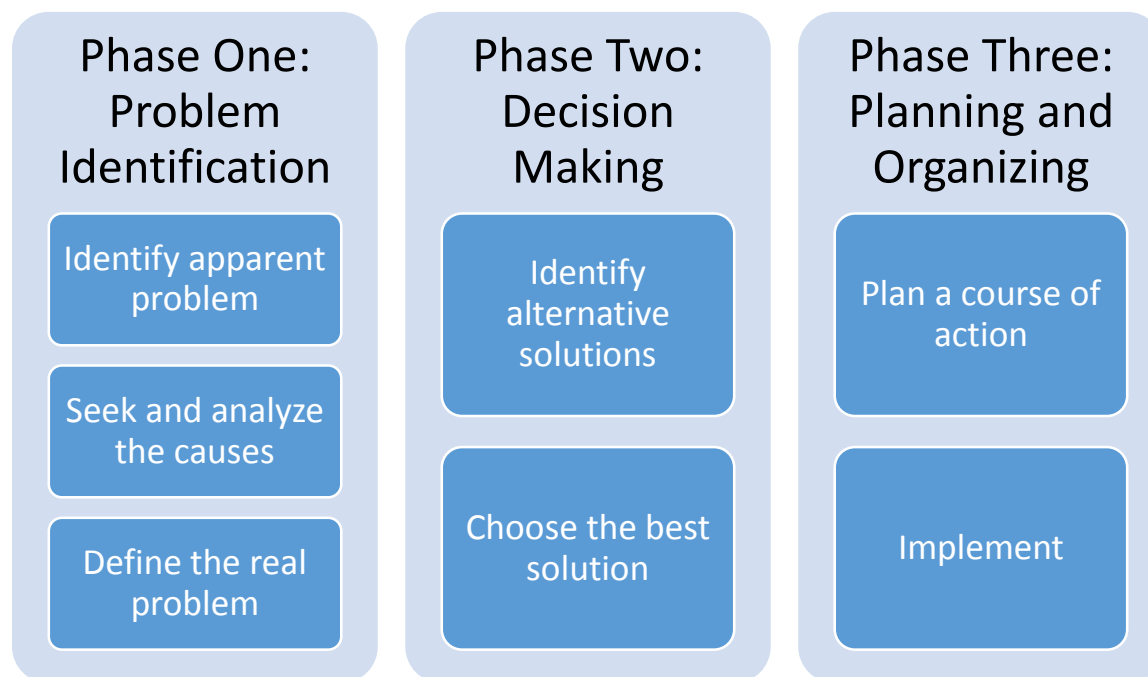
Often anger results from some sort of unresolved issue... in other words, a problem that needs to be solved.

Whenever you read a book on problem solving, this model, in some form or other, is sure to be there. It may have six steps rather than seven, or it may have five steps. However, the model doesn't really change...just the authors' ways of breaking it down.

As you work your way from problem to solution, you are actually shifting your focus.

- When you define a problem, you ask yourself: What is my problem?
- As you try to analyze the root causes you ask: Why is it a problem?
- When you are generating options, you ask yourself: What are some ways I can solve my problem?

The Problem Solving Model

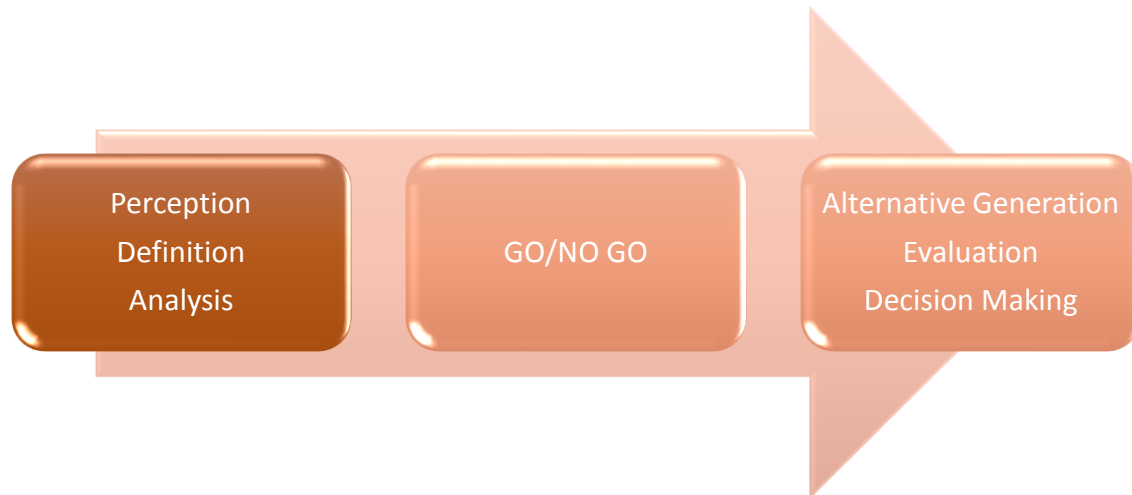


This model doesn't just work on paper: it applies across a range of problem solving activities. It is the very basis for informed and consistent problem solving. If you are someone who loves tools, this is your basic tool.

We often don't spend enough time in defining a problem, and that in itself is a problem. Don't be in too big a rush to get the solution worked out: make sure you know what you need to know. Then, make a commitment to continually check back with the first stage to make sure the problem is the same.

Another Perspective

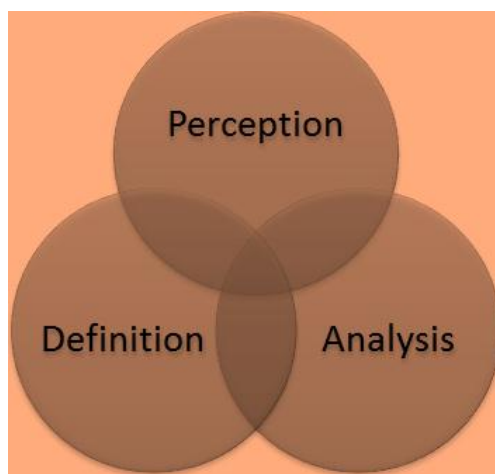
Here is another way of breaking down the three phases:



We recommend that you spend most of your time on the first block: perception, definition, and analysis. As we've mentioned already in this course, we often don't spend enough time in defining a problem, and that in itself is a problem. Don't be in too big a rush to get the solution worked out: make sure you know what you need to know first. Then, make a commitment to continually check back with the first stage to make sure the problem is the same.

Keeping an Open Mind

Part of the problem solving process is re-evaluating and evolving. This will ensure you reach the best solution possible. Consider how perception, definition, and analysis overlap:



Solving Problems the “Right” Way

Don’t let people try to convince you there is one “right” or “best” way to solve problems, or to solve a particular problem. Problem solving is all about applying educated trial and error. With so many different kinds of problems to deal with, there is no system that works in every situation. Many solutions are possible, and some are better than others.

Your skill as a problem-solver depends on your expertise with the tools and your knowledge of how to use them. You know you don’t always solve problems step by step. Sometimes you have a solution before you know what problem it solves. For example, you decide to move your bed against another wall and you find out the next morning that the sun doesn’t wake you up so early.

However, for many situations, having formal steps to follow can help you create flexible, workable solutions.

Phase One

About Phase One

Let’s take a look at the first phase of the three-phase model.



Here is a breakdown of each step in the problem identification process. In all three steps, your focus is on the problem itself. Only afterward will you start thinking about solutions.

Perception

You ask yourself: Is there a problem? Where is the problem? Whose problem is it? This is the sniffing, groping, grasping stage. It includes whatever you do to get a handle on the problem.

What are the symptoms? Funny noises in the engine, an unhappy look on your employee's face, or a change in the productivity rate? You've got to find out what the problem is.

The purpose of this phase is:

- To surface an issue.
- To make it okay to discuss it (legitimize).
- To air different points of view.
- To avoid perception wars.
- To get group agreement to work on the problem.

Steps in this phase include:

- Legitimizing the problem; make it okay to discuss it.
- Asking, "How does the problem feel?" and, "What's the real problem?"
- Identifying the best, worst, and most probable situation.
- Identifying whose problem it is.

Definition

Here, we state the problem as a question. Our goal is to grasp the general idea of the problem and then draw the rope tighter to get a more specific idea of the problem.

Steps in this phase include identifying:

- What is the problem?
- What is not the problem?

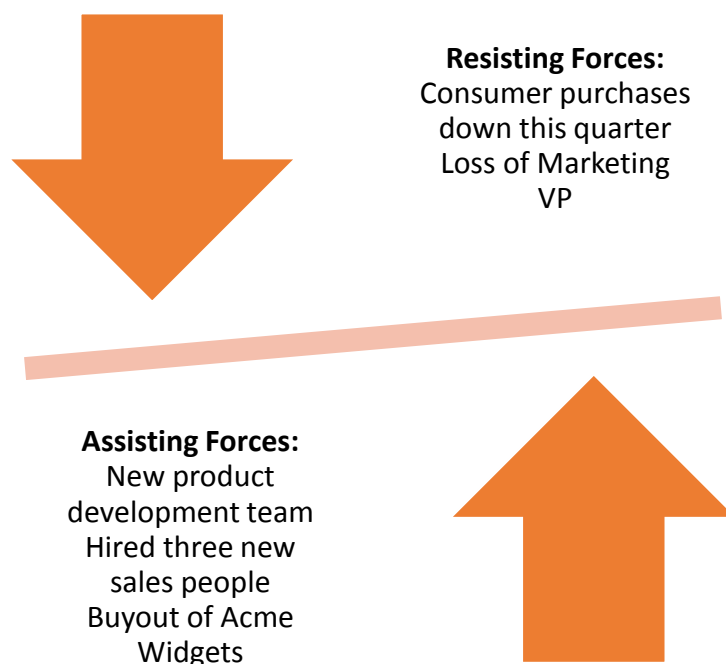
Analysis

Now that we have a general idea of the problem, we will use analytical tools to define it even further. Steps in this phase can include the following.

Ask basic questions, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Break it down into smaller pieces. For example, if we know that the problem is that revenue is down, we can break it down into possible areas of cause: manufacturing, shipping, or sales.

Use force field analysis. This is a structured method of looking at two opposing forces acting on a situation. Simply draw a line on a piece of paper. On one half of the line, list the forces that are working to solve the problem. On the other half, list the forces that are stopping you from solving the problem. Let's say that revenue is down this quarter. Our force field might look like this:



Move from **generalizations to specific examples** as a way of testing what the problem is or is not. For example, you could say, "Our company has really been doing poorly all year." We could further identify how the company has been doing poorly; let's say that the production department in particular has been less efficient, costing the company money. Then, we can look at what aspect in particular is doing poorly.

Ask the expert. Find a person who has dealt with this sort of issue before.

Phase Two

About Phase Two

Until the three steps of problem identification have been covered, don't proceed to phase two (decision making).



If people don't agree on the problem, they will never agree on a solution!

Creative Thinking Methods

Here are some tools you can use to come up with ideas.

Brainstorming

Draw a circle in the middle of a page and write down your problem. Then, draw lines from that circle and write down some solutions. Don't worry if they're wacky, impossible, or silly; this is a time for creative thinking, not critical thinking. Capturing the range of ideas is what is important here.



Checkerboard

This is a more organized form of brainstorming and can be particularly helpful for people who don't like how chaotic a brainstorming session can become. With this method, you organize your thoughts into a table. We still want creative thinking rather than critical thinking, but this method may help you develop ideas.

Here is an example of a checkerboard.

Main Solution	Possible Specific Solutions		
Create safe passage between building and parking/bus stop	Have security escort night staff to their cars or bus stop	Rearrange shifts so that people come and go during daylight hours	Set up a buddy system with employees
People missing work in snowstorm	Set up 50% of staff with ability to work from home during storms	Arrange for temporary shelters so that staff can stay overnight	Provide incentives for employees to put winter tires on their vehicles and learn safe winter driving
Threat of strike is rumored	Set up contract negotiations well before contract expires	Approach union and ask to speak with them	Set up contingency plan to ensure business continuity in the event of a strike

Next, cut up solutions and move them around, or use your computer. This can help you organize your ideas and generate even more solutions!

Research and Report

Look at what others have done. Do some research and prepare a report. What lessons can you learn from this information?

Evaluation

Now that we have some solutions in mind, it's time to evaluate the solutions to see which ones are feasible.

- Sort solutions by category. This can be similar to the checkerboard above, just with some critical thinking applied.
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages to each solution.
- Identify what you like about each idea and what you don't like.
- Number your ideas in order, from the one that seems the most feasible to the one that seems the least feasible. This is useful for small problems.

Decision Making

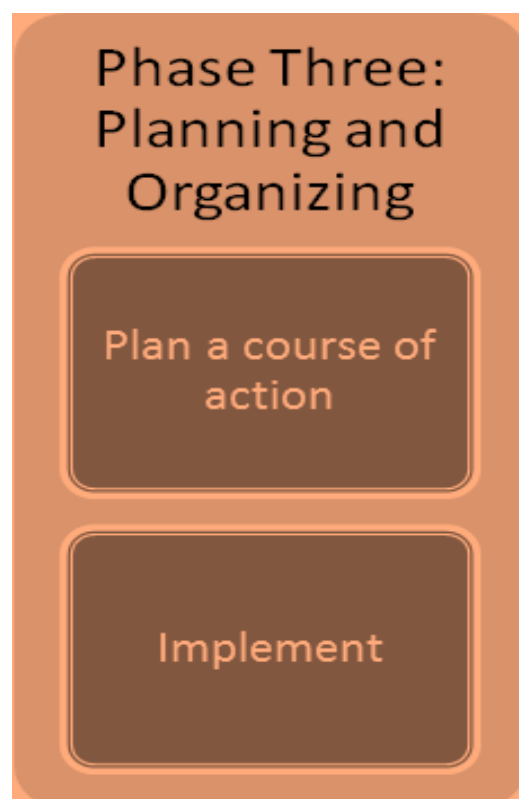
Once you have evaluated the options, it's time to make a decision. Here are some ways you can do it:

- Get a consensus from the group on the best solution.
- Don't limit yourself to one option; you may find that you can combine solutions for super success. (This is called the both/and method.)
- To make voting easier, you may want to eliminate the solutions that the group as a whole absolutely won't consider.
- Try to focus on agreements during all voting.
- Use straw voting: Take a quick, non-binding yes/no vote on the current solution as proposed.
- Try negative voting: Rather than asking who is for a solution, ask who is against the proposed solution.
- Back off! The group may need some time to evaluate the options before making a decision.

Phase Three

About Phase Three

Our last phase should be planning how to implement the solution and performing the actual implementation.



Planning

For the planning portion, start by breaking the task down into smaller portions. Then, for each mini-task, plan the following information:

- What needs to be done?
- Who will do it?
- What resources will we need?
- How much time will it take? (Set a deadline!)

Once all the smaller tasks are planned out, you will have an idea of how long the main solution will take to implement. You may also want to make sure that the above questions are answered for the main task.

Implementation

Implementation is a cycle of three activities:

- Figuring out what you are going to do
- Doing it
- Reacting to what happened or getting feedback

Sooner or later, you have to try out your solution!

Solution Planning Worksheet

It can help to lay out what you are planning to do. Here is an example of a solution planning worksheet.

Problem: Revenue down 10%

Solution: Develop new product

Task 1	Engineering will design product.	
	What needs to be done?	Product needs to be designed.
	Who will do it?	Jim and Sue from Engineering.
	What resources will they need?	Unknown. They should have all resources in house; we will make sure they know we can assist in obtaining more resources if necessary.

	How much time will it take?	Targeted completion date: Dec. 31
Task 2	Prototype will be created.	
	What needs to be done?	Prototype needs to be developed.
	Who will do it?	Sam from Manufacturing, Jill from Engineering
	What resources will they need?	May need testing group; we will help provide this
	How much time will it take?	Targeted completion date: Feb. 28
Task 3	Product will be manufactured.	
	What needs to be done?	Product needs to be created.
	Who will do it?	Joe from Manufacturing
	What resources will they need?	All resources in-house
	How much time will it take?	Targeted completion date: Dec. 31

The Problem Solving Toolkit

There are some techniques we can use to help us at every stage of the problem solving process.

The Lasso

Can we tighten up our definition of the problem?

- “How can we improve communication in our group?” What do we mean by communication?
- “How can we get our work done more efficiently?” What do we mean by efficiently?

Is/Is Not

The Is/Is Not technique lets us eliminate assumptions and emphasize facts. For example, someone says, “The telephone system isn’t working.” You might ask them to list what isn’t working and list what is working. Perhaps all functions are affected, or perhaps only incoming calls have been affected.

Graphics

A diagram allows us to see things visually. For example, think of personality types, which can be depicted visually as well as verbally. For some, a graph is more beneficial than a score or a label. For others, one type of categorizing is better than another type of categorizing.

Basic Questions

Who, what, where, when, why, how?

Criteria

In many situations it can be very helpful to have already determined what the criteria will be for your best solution. For example, let's say that you and your spouse are going out to celebrate your anniversary. Where are you going to go? Well, rather than the old harangue about: "Where do you want to go?" and, "I don't care. It's up to you," how about developing criteria ahead of time?

Some examples:

- The place must have a liquor license, since you want a glass of wine with your meal.
- It shouldn't cost an arm and a leg, yet you don't want the fast food joint just down the road. A cost of \$20 to \$30 per person is another criterion.
- You want a place where you can have chicken and your spouse can have seafood.
- It shouldn't be more than 50 miles away, since you both have to work tomorrow.
- It should take reservations. You don't want to go to all that trouble and then find the place has no table for you.

Now you can brainstorm, but the brainstorming will be modified or restrained, since you've already identified the criteria that the restaurant must meet.

Force Field Analysis

Force field analysis examines restraining forces (forces that discourage the problem) vs. sustaining forces (forces that encourage a problem). Take an example like John arriving late for work.

What are the restraining forces?

- Boss is angry
- John is behind with his work

- Parking spots all gone

What are the sustaining forces?

- Gets to sleep an extra 15 minutes
- Takes the kids to the babysitter
- Misses traffic on way to work

Then the question becomes, how can we weaken the sustaining forces and strengthen or shore up some of the restraining forces?

Legitimizing Problems and Positions

Problems are okay. Everyone has problems. They are a fact of life. Human beings couldn't live without change and stimulation in their environment, and problems provide that change and stimulation. So it's all right to have a problem as long as you are willing to do something about it. In our society we often think that having a problem is like admitting failure. Some of us refuse to admit we have problems, or we ignore or hide them.

Task Information

Now that we've been through the problem solving process, let's apply it to an anger problem.

Problem

Gina and Cindy are working on a project together. All of a sudden, Cindy explodes, yelling, "You're so stupid! I'm never going to get this done if I have to work with you." Gina is shocked; her and Cindy have always worked together well in the past.

Phase One: Problem Identification and Definition

- Identify apparent problem: Cindy has some sort of issue with Gina.
- Seek and analyze causes: There is some other stress in Cindy's life that is making her more emotional.
- Define the real problem: Cindy is having problems at home.

Phase Two: Decision Making

- Identify alternative solutions: Cindy can try to deal with the problem on her own, seek the support of family or friends, or seek professional help.
- Choose the best solution: Up to Cindy; we would suggest professional help.

Phase Three: Planning and Organizing

- Plan a course of action: Get the names of three therapists from her doctor, interview each, and decide who is most suitable. Keep all appointments and track progress in a journal.
- Implement: Start by making the doctor's appointment.

Skill Application

Apply the problem solving steps we just discussed to your pre-assignment problem.

Phase One: Problem Identification and Definition

Identify Apparent Problem

Seek and Analyze Causes

Define the Real Problem

Phase Two: Decision Making

Identify Alternative Solutions

Choose the Best Solution

Phase Three: Planning and Organizing

Plan a Course of Action

Implement

Other Ways of Managing Anger

Coping Strategies

List some coping strategies for anger.

Sanctuary

Another coping strategy is to think of some place where you always feel calm and secure and confident. Picture it in your mind. Be able to describe this place.

- What does it look like?
- Do you associate any sounds with your sanctuary?
- What does your sanctuary feel like?
- What does your sanctuary smell like?
- What are its emotional components? (Safety, calmness...)

Outline your sanctuary below.

Relaxation Techniques

It's essential that you learn to relax if you want to reduce your anger levels. If stress seems to be wearing you down and you are having trouble bouncing back, you may need to consult your doctor. However, for the usual day to day stressors that we encounter, here are some quick, easy ways that you can lower your stress levels quickly.

Deep Breathing

Loosen your clothes, close your eyes, mentally relax your body, and take ten or more deep breaths. Your goal is to breathe into the bottom of your lungs (where the oxygen is readily absorbed), not the usual upper lung breathing we do. Put your hand on your stomach and feel it move as you inhale to make sure you are getting the air in good and deep. We call this **diaphragmatic breathing** because you are using your diaphragm muscle to breathe. When people are experiencing anxiety, they are most often breathing into the upper area of their lungs rather than the bottom.

Each time you exhale, count silently: "one," after the first breath, "two," after the second breath, etc., up to at least ten. If you lose count, or find yourself working on thoughts as they pass through your mind, start your count over again. When you are finished, you should feel more calm and relaxed. (Your blood pressure will go down temporarily too.) If you're in a meeting, on the phone, or dealing with a customer, count in your head.

Visualize

Use positive imagery to boost your mood. In your mind, picture a place that you love. Feel the sunshine on your face, or the breeze on your skin. See the things that you love to see in great detail. If you are getting ready for a presentation or an interview, visualize yourself performing it perfectly. This way, when you get to the event your mind thinks you've done it before, so it will be even easier than the last time you did it. (This is a technique used by athletes and performance coaches.)

Music

Music has the power to soothe, or to give us energy. It actually has healing power. Find a type of music that relaxes you and play it when you need to calm down. When you feel tired and listless, play some rousing music (rather than relying on caffeine or other stimulants) to give you a pick-up.

Acupressure and Massage

Holding a fingertip to the point of most pain or tension and pressing very hard into the offending muscle for up to a minute can avert a headache or relieve tension. Have a friend or spouse learn how to do massage therapy and/or acupressure on tense muscles, since daily treatment is better than once or twice a month.

Laughter

Laughter is the best medicine of all. A good belly laugh can lower blood pressure, slow your adrenaline, and reverse the stomach acid that comes with negative responses. Be on the lookout for jokes and cartoons you can share with family and friends. For a smaller dose, find a cartoon or picture that always makes you smile and post it near your desk. (Just make sure it's appropriate for all audiences!)

Replace Worry with Problem Solving

Focus on what you can do, and then go ahead and do it. Chronic worriers tend to focus on what they cannot do, what should be happening, or how things are going wrong. Replace worry with problem solving so that you identify where you can step in. Then, stop waiting for the perfect time and do it.

Resilience

Each stressful experience that you have prepares you to deal with one in the future. The more resilient you become, the less of an impact each of these events has on your mind and body. Lots of us go to

great lengths to avoid stress, and although avoidance initially feels like you are doing alright, the reality is that stressful things come up in our life all the time. The better we are at handling them, the more resilient we become, and the healthier we can be.

Each stressful experience leads us into a cycle of confusion and anguish. If we stay with those feelings in an attempt to minimize the impact the stress will have on our life, things actually get worse. But if we make a decision to deal with those circumstances by problem solving and adapting, we develop resilience and can enjoy life more and be more successful.

As you encounter more stressors in life (and we all do), we can rely on the experience we've had in dealing with negative circumstances in order to cope. We get more effective at managing that cycle of confusion, anguish, problem solving, adapting, and moving on.

A Systems Approach

Violence expert Norman Keith proposes a nine-stage plan to help organizations prevent workplace violence:

1. Develop a violence prevention policy and program
2. Develop risk assessment processes and checklists
3. Maintain due diligence when hiring
4. Check workplace design
5. Review workplace practices and procedures
6. Check security systems and personnel
7. Implement worker training
8. Develop emergency response plans
9. Review and audit the program