Ongoing Discussion "Thought Piece"

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Background: This month's Thought Piece was taken from Anna's book, **How to Reduce Workplace Conflict and Stress,** available from her at http://www.therarising.com/products.cfm. The content which follows represents the second and third chapters.

Chapter Two

Anger Makes You Stupid, Lonely *and* Depressed; The Stinky Twins; Blaming Others, Blaming Self

A healthy brain exists to carry out your instructions—
you are the composer, it is your instrument.
Deepak Chopra, M.D.

During a seminar I was discussing the physiology of positive and negative energy and Bruce had been riveted to his seat. Now that we were on break he couldn't stop talking.

Bruce told me he was a Vietnam veteran still struggling from the trauma of combat and reflexive, aggressive reactions to frustration and threat. "In one morning of listening to you I've learned more about managing anger" he said, "and the reasons behind my irrational behavior, than I've learned in twenty years of outpatient therapy at the VA."

Three years later we saw each other again. Bruce walked into a seminar I was teaching and sat in the back. On break he came over, excited to tell me his good news.

"Anna, when I met you I was exhausted from a life that was filled with tension and conflict. I was beginning to feel that death was the only way to peace."

"But sitting in your seminar I realized there is a totally different way to look at the world, and since then I've made tremendous progress."

He shifted in his chair and leaned forward, "In fact, I was elected leader of my service organization! That's how far I've come!

Recently, during a meeting one of the members got agitated and started yelling. I was able to calm him down using the methods you taught us. And then, to my surprise, I realized the entire room was calm--everyone was more relaxed and yet, people were animated. The energy was at the ceiling when we adjourned!

"And then the greatest thing of all happened. I realized I was the one who did it. I realized I could create the positive energy I needed so desperately. I didn't need to depend on anyone else to do it for me.

I'm not afraid anymore! Coming to your class was the beginning of this shift and I will never forget you."

When we met, Bruce was on a mission--to regain his inherent right to positive connections and feelings about himself and others. He not only developed new skills in controlling his anger, he learned he could also manage anger in others. With these new competencies he was able to generate positive energy with the people and projects he valued.

The previous chapter contained a brief overview of the three responses to frustration. In this chapter we'll focus on the two reflexive responses that had been Bruce's nemesis; blaming others and blaming self. As you'll see, blaming others when

you are frustrated not only makes you hostile, but as Bruce intimately knew, it makes you more vulnerable to exhaustion and depression.

I'm frustrated and it's *your* fault!

Blaming others when facing one of your 750,000 (as discussed in Chapter One; an average of 30 heart-hassles and mini-crises a day multiplied over a life time) frustrations is giving your brain the command, "Search for stupidity!" You assume someone else caused your frustration: a peer, boss, another department or a colleague who snubbed you in yesterday's meeting.

Figure 3. 750,000 frustrations; arrow to "blame others"

The chilling reality of this approach is that your brain *will* find data that makes the other person look irrational and unreasonable. In a manner similar to searching for data on Google, once you limit your "search" to negative perceptions, your mind will present only data that fits your search criteria.

For a dramatic example of how compliant our brains become once we see someone in a negative light read, "Transforming the Enemy" in the appendix. It's a very revealing story of how I struggled for seven years with a seemingly insurmountable problem, only to discover that part of the problem lay between my ears.

When searching for blame, our thoughts will focus on "who," not "why" and they will sound similar to, *" I wouldn't be bringing work home tonight if my boss wasn't such a suck-up." "The board rejected our proposal because they are totally out of touch with the market!" "The Human Resource Coordinator is a bleeding heart! How can I get a decent days work out of the low-lifes she keeps referring to me?!"*

Hitler and reflexive, irrational response to frustration

The importance of this subtle pattern can't be overstated. Hitler's reign over Nazi Germany is a classic example of a leader who stayed rigidly transfixed to the machinery of blame. He pitched his ideology to a frustrated, humiliated populace. Germans were not only frustrated by years of economic depression they were bitter about the restitutions imposed following WWI; Germany lost land, colonies, the right to maintain an army and were saddled with crushing penalties. They felt trapped and hopeless.

Hitler had a disillusioned and emasculated critical mass to preached his beliefs. Early on he blamed Germany's problems on the developmentally and physically disabled, Catholics, Gypsies, homosexuals, and Jews. He claimed they were a drain on society

Hitler stayed true to his distorted thinking despite its explosive consequences and lack of impact on solving the economic crises. His legacy paints a clear portrait of the futility and irrationality of blaming people—especially for complex systemic problems.

Figure 4. Frustration; Hitler

Fortunately Roosevelt was the political leader leading the US during the critical years of the depression. In Chapter Three we'll look at his approach, which is a classic example of the more reflective, and effective, thinking pattern.

Inflammatory thinking and flooding

Blaming others for problems "inflames" frustrations. Individuals who use inflammatory thinking, exaggerate the significance and pervasiveness of the inconvenience.

Examples of inflammatory thinking include: *"I can't stand this! Why is the coffee pot* always *empty?!" "Just my luck to have my computer crash now! Those idiots in IT!" "She's purposely avoiding me--just to make me look bad! We'll never hit our project deadline! We're going to get canned!"*

Figure 5: Inflammatory thinking

In this chapter I'll introduce three situations where blame and inflammatory thinking took center stage. In Chapter Three we'll return to these stories to see how the behavior of the key players changed when they analyzed their situation using a different thinking pattern.

In the first case study involves an entire company simultaneously engaged in inflammatory, blame-based thinking in response to an unanticipated and surprising announcement.

"Tony" was an attorney in a corporate legal department of a manufacturing firm. The president had called a company-wide staff meeting to update the 200+ employees on his plan to acquire a new facility. Once the staff had gathered, the audience was stunned when owner the announced that instead of acquiring a new building, he had decided to close the Minneapolis office and move the entire operation to his hometown in South Carolina.

The owner's reasons for the sudden shift were vague. The president tried to reassure the audience by saying the "brightest and best" would be invited to relocate, but the rest of the work force would soon be without jobs. Tony's colleagues walked back to their departments in shock. Within a few minutes their surprise turned into outrage, anger and blame.

Tony, who had developed solid relationships with almost every division in the company, spent the next hour walking through the facility and listening as his colleagues spewed out their hostility. The engineers turned against their traditional foe, marketing, *"This is marketing's fault! They dropped the ball on acquiring new markets."*

As he wandered into the next division, Tony heard equally angry reactions in the

sales group, aimed at engineering. *"I told the engineering department to back down! But they didn't listen. They kept adding features to our products that drove our costs sky-high. Korea and Japan didn't help either! They've bulldozed their way into the American market!"*

As Tony wandered back to the legal department he saw his colleagues huddled in a circle, centered on their own speculations about whom to blame, *"The owner is selfish and probably returning to his home state to hunt and fish! He's your typical callous executive, thinking only of himself."*

This situation is a perfect example of blame-based thinking, where each individual seeks to place blame for frustration on another party. Emotional reactions aren't the only aspect of the problem. As Tony's colleague's thinking inflamed, *so did their bodies*. This reaction to anger is called flooding because when stressed, our bodies *flood* with cortisol and adrenaline and heart beat increases. Under the influence of inflammatory thinking, behavior becomes irrational.

In the blame orientation, the problem is someone else's fault; therefore the solution is beyond reach. Because inflammatory, blame-based thinking eliminates your ability to see options, you feel trapped. Your body reacts with aggression and activates the fight or flight response. Blame leads to emotional and physical arousal because inflammatory thinking has activated stress hormones, turning a minor inconvenience into a perception that this injustice is intolerable!

Unless you are facing physical danger and speed and strength are important assets, flooding is counter-productive.

When individuals in the workplace use blame and inflammatory thinking, they often express their aggression in cold, subtle ways. Withdrawal, hoarding information,

ostracizing, or "forgetting" to inform someone of an important meeting are passive forms of aggression. Aggression seldom results in *physical* attacks at work. When individuals are determined to damage a colleague, direct report or supervisor, they do so verbally and attack their competence and character--two traits that people guard diligently.

Contempt contaminates employees *and* clients

When conflict between leaders escalates, it not only damages their relationship, it traumatizes the organization and customers. For example, imagine Rhonda, the V. P. of Sales, is frustrated with the slow response from Operations, and makes a cutting remark about the V.P., of Operations, Ted. She might directly criticize his motives or competence to her staff, and privately complain to a board member or CEO.

Contempt is the result of chronic,
negative thoughts and assumptions.

It is inevitable that her negative accusations will leak back to Ted and Rhonda's comments will trigger a vicious cycle of negativity. Within the organization colleagues will spread what she has said and it will eventually leak to close customers.

In an attempt to appease frustrated customers sales employees will insinuate that operations is dropping the ball. When a customer raises this issue with Ted he will be furious. He knows that his reputation is at stake and he must act to regain his standing. However, he will not go directly to Rhonda. He will attempt to discredit her by spreading negative accusations about her work and character.

Employees will pick up and amplify negative attitudes and rumors, and as a result they bring distorted or filtered data back to their supervisors.

When Ted and Rhonda discover that their mistrust and dislike for each other

permeates their departments their negative assumptions will appear justified. Ted will think, “It’s not just me who’s having problems with Rhonda. Both of my direct reports complain about the same issues.” Rhonda will be receiving similar confirmations about her dislike for Ted.

Employees mirror a supervisor's mistrust as an act of loyalty, not malice. They want their boss and department to be aware of any possible threat.

If anyone within the team dares to break ranks and make a positive statement about the other group, their team will immediately reframed the targeted party’s behavior as an act of manipulation.

Ted and Rhonda will continue to elevate their power struggle and subtly lobby their peers and CEO to adopt a negative perspective of the other person or group. Now every tidbit of negative information becomes a commodity. Ted and Rhonda will distort what is known and assume or fabricate what isn’t. Each of them will attempt to bias more members to join their side and take a position against the other party.

If you were to sit in on one of their meetings a few months later, the executive team will look as if they had circled their wagons and were shooting inward!

Again, most power struggles aren’t triggered by the intention to do harm. These conflicts are the result of passionate, well-intended and caring individuals who are unaware of the destructive nature of seemingly benign, and certainly common behaviors.

When individuals are chronically over-taxed, and feel besieged by workplace demands, blaming behaviors become automatic responses. Rhonda and Ted can’t see three months down the road to where their snide comments will take them. However, if they act reflexively their views of the world will narrow and they will see each other as enemies, needing to be conquered at any cost.

60% of customers take their business elsewhere after being treated with disrespect

The manner in which employees treat customers is determined, in part, by the norms for handling internal conflict and frustration. If the boss uses anger, sarcasm and put-downs when he or she is frustrated with direct reports it sends me a clear message about what he or she will consider justified or acceptable with customers.

However, customers have more options than employees and don't tolerate being treated with disrespect. A survey by Eticom in Columbia S.C., found that 60% of customers take their business elsewhere where they are treated rudely by an employee--even if they have to drive further or pay more for the same service! Even more disturbingly, 75% of disgruntled customers walk away without telling a manager or supervisor why they have lost their business. Customer Care Measurement and Consulting of Virginia, found that more than 10% of disgruntled customers get even by complaining on an online bulletin board or chat room.

Predictable workplace targets and scapegoats

When the thinking patterns of blame and contempt take over an organization, no one is safe. Individuals or entire groups are targeted for any conceivable reason. Traditional targets include sales, operations, budgeting, information services, purchasing, the night shift, new hires, the union, customers, the parent company, the plant in Kentucky, etc. Front-line workers blame a boss or the CEO, and the CEO blames the board. Architects blame project managers, city councils blame the mayor, support staff blames administration, firefighters blame headquarters, branch offices blame corporate, corporate blames field staff, etc.,

Anger is a feeling; hostility is an attitude

I've watched many leaders foolishly attempt to create team cohesiveness through hostility and denigration of other people or departments with statements such as, *"Those jerks in sales don't care if we make a profit off this order!"* Hostility can be used as the 'sugar high' of groups. It is quick and easy, and it is widely utilized in highly frustrated climates, because channeling anger toward a convenient target takes little effort or skill. However, this reflexive response only *appears* to meet the needs of employees and coworkers.

The more frequently we encourage, or tolerate anger in response to frustration, the more likely it is that we, or our group, will develop an attitude of hostility and resentment. We are reinforcing specific neural pathways in our brains. With enough repetitions the anger-response becomes automatic and less conscious. Bobby Knight is an example of a well-known individual (NBA coach) who flooded so frequently that he couldn't stop, even when it cost him his job and the support of his fans.

Toxic anger, hostility and heart disease

Anger is a coping strategy for many individuals. To the uninformed, hostility and blame appears to help them gain an edge. Blaming others seems to side step the nitty-gritty work of problem solving, or helps one to take center stage and generate energy when the team is in a slump. However, one of the many costs of hostility and blame is a dramatic increase in the risk for heart disease.

The identification of Type A behavior was of the first times Western medicine acknowledged the relationship between emotions and health. Early work in this area identified four traits that were linked to heart disease: 1) ambition 2) urgency 3) a competitive orientation and 4) hostility.

However, in the mid 1980s, Dr. Redford Williams, a psychiatrist and director of the Behavioral Medical Research Center at Duke University, and Drs. Margaret Chesney and Michael Hecker at Stanford Research Institute concluded that the first three characteristics associated with Type A are not risk factors. You can be in busy, in a hurry and competitive (if you can do so without hostility) and you won't increase your risk for heart disease. These researchers discovered that *the risk factor lies in a hostile reaction* to life's inevitable frustrations. Frequent, prolonged and intense anger increases your risk for one of America's biggest killers of both men and women.

When you become angry, your body rapidly increases the amount of available energy through an increase in hormones, blood pressure and pulse rates. Cortisol, one the hormones release during heightened anger, is a particularly troublesome chemical. It damages the cells lining the heart, and makes it more difficult for the body to calm down.

Your defense system also secretes chemicals to thicken your blood in case you are physically wounded. People who are fueled by a regular diet of hostility are quietly developing arteriosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, in response to elevated levels of blood thickening chemicals. I've now heard about two cases where this happened in as little as six months.

No mater how many times you work out at the gym or how careful you are to eat correctly, you're putting yourself at risk if you don't manage your anger effectively.

Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D.

As one author states, every time you get angry it's like having one, one thousandth (1/1,000) of a heart attack. This process is controlled by an ancient defense system designed to ensure you can outrun a hungry predator. However, in modern

society, wild boars rarely jump out from behind a file cabinet! In today's culture, individuals have elevated levels of cortisol and adrenaline in reaction to their own inability to manage relatively minor emotional events. The majority of modern day risks for heart disease are not created by the threat of physical danger, they are created by our *thinking*.

Dr. Williams and his colleagues at Duke discovered data to support his theory that hostility and heart disease are linked. They found personality tests (the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) that had been given to college students in 1954. Twenty-five years had passed since the students had taken the test. One of the traits measured by the test was hostility. Williams suspected that if they were correct, they would find a correlation between high levels of hostility and early death rates.

Figure 6: Correlation between hostility and early mortality

You can see in Williams' data that in the low hostility group, five percent had died during the following 25 years. However, *twenty* percent of the high hostility group had died, from all causes, but primarily from heart disease.

Prior to Dr. William's work most researchers agreed that the main risk factors associated with heart disease were cigarette smoking, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. However, the link between emotions and health is so powerful that in his best selling book, *The Trusting Heart,* Dr. Williams concludes that hostility is a better predictor of death rates from coronary blockage than the other three factors. A study at University of North Carolina tracked medical doctors for 25 years and found the ones with high hostility scores were *seven times* more likely to die from heart disease by age 50 than those with low hostility scores.

At 100 heartbeats per minute we can no longer hear

John Gottman, a researcher and psychologist, spent 20 years obtaining biofeedback data (heart rhythms, blood pressure, etc.,) on couples while they were engaged in tense discussions. In his book, *The Seven Principles That Make Marriages Work*, Gottman relates that the human body can go from a normal heartbeat (82 beats per minute for women and 76 for men) to 165 beats per minute when it believes it is at risk for harm. *"When we wire couples up during a tense discussion you can see how physically distressing flooding is."* Gottman found that after your heartbeat goes above 100 beats per minute *we literally cannot hear what the other person is saying, even if we try.*

In addition to increasing the risk factor for heart disease, flooding also suppresses the immune system. Researchers found that when subjects just *imagined* someone they didn't like for five minutes their immune systems were suppressed for six hours!

This information had a strong impact on me. Before I read these researcher's work I would get furious when I was on the freeway and somebody cut me off. I'd fume, *"Who do you think you are--putting all of us in danger!? You jerk!"*

Although I knew that getting angry with a reckless driver was useless in any practical way, I didn't see it as harmful. However, once I learned how damaging it was to my body I made a commitment to change my response. Now, when someone does something dangerous, I think about the death rates associated with hostility and calm my body by saying, *"Don't bother getting all worked up. Nature is going to take that person out of the gene pool!"*

Males rage . . . and rescue . . . more

Anthropologists believe that for 99.99% of the time we've been on the planet people organized themselves in small clans of hunters and gatherers. Although men and

women had great respect for the other gender, we were bound by rigid gender roles: women gathered and men hunted. These differences are still reflected in our physiology.

Our remarkable technological accomplishments notwithstanding, modern human beings still occupy cavemen bodies.
Charles Stroebel, M.D.

Men, in their roles as hunters, faced many dangers. The ability to flood rapidly and intensely was an important asset to fend off physical danger and to subjugate prey.

These ancient differences help us understand why the majority of people in prison for violent crimes are males. In a study of 10,037 incidents of road rage only 413 of the perpetrators were female. Men flood more quickly and intensively!

However, men also do the vast majority of rescue work because . . . they flood! When it comes to physical heroism, flooding is a significant benefit in terms of boosting speed and strength. However, not only is flooding a risk factor for heart disease, the second price we pay when we flood is the ability to problem solve.

Anger makes you stupid

Figure 7: Medulla/Cortex

When you are flooded, problem solving - which occurs in the largest part of the human brain, the **cortex** - is severely impaired, and this has a profound impact on behavior. Have you ever been in a heated argument and been unable to think of a pointed response? Or, have you blurted out an intended zinger that made no sense? Author Laurence Peter captured this dilemma: *"Speak when you're angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."*

To add insult to injury, the point you were trying to make only becomes clear later

on, then you think, *"Why didn't I say . . . ?"* This is a good example of the medulla at work, hijacking higher systems of thought. Think about the ECG rhythms of frustration in Chapter One. When you flood, this ancient part of the brain pumps you up physically, but at the cost of your ability to problem solve. Your body prepares to fight for survival even if the object of your hostility is an empty coffee pot in the company break room.

> ***Intelligence capacity is diminished when frustration, anxiety or inner turmoil operate. Such emotional states cause incoherence in the rhythmic and electrical output of the heart, diminishing neurological efficiency. It's one of the reasons smart people can do stupid things.***
>
> Doc Childre and Bruce Cryer,
> From Chaos to Coherence

On different occasions fire chiefs have approached me during seminars and told me that flooding is a serious concern in their work. Even *looking* at the fire starts activating the fight or flight response and impairs the chief's ability to think strategically. As a result it's the policy of some municipalities to position the chief so his view of the fire is blocked, and all his information is auditory. By blocking their view they are better able to avoid flooding and engage in the critical problem analysis that their roles require.

In the past, therapists encouraged people to flood and act out their aggression in order to release anger. People with suppressed rage were encouraged to beat on pillows and yell as a means of resolution and release. However, research done at Iowa State University by Dr. Brad Bushman concluded that venting doesn't eliminate or dampen the expression of violence; it actually makes it more likely it will occur again. Dr. Bushman wrote in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, "Expressing anger produces harmful effects--it increases aggression."* In other words, it weakens people's

natural inhibitions against violent outbursts and, according to HeartMath reinforces the neurons that make this reaction automatic. In the book, *"Anger: the Misunderstood Emotion,"* author Carol Travis wrote, "*The biggest, fattest cultural myth, the elephant in our living room. . . is that catharsis is good for you."*

Is yelling effective?

As I presented this data during a seminar, a construction supervisor blurted out, *"But you don't understand. Yelling at people works! When I yell at a contractor I get results! They move!"* I was sympathetic to his frustration, as I was challenging one of his favorite motivational strategies. *"John,"* I responded, "*when you yell, they do respond to your anger. However, they are becoming physiologically flooded and their ability to problem-solve will be impaired. Is that the kind of worker you want on your site?"* John grew quiet as he weighed this important consequence of losing his temper.

June RiceTangney and Ronda Dearling in the book *Shame and Guilt* found that feelings of shame, which are usually the result of an attack on the *person*, not a specific behavior, actually provoke more anger toward others and do little, to nothing, to bring about an improvement in behavior.

When we give in to our anger and scream at partners, employees, or children they certainly scramble. But as their bodies activate flight or fight, they will be unable to fully utilize their cortex. In addition, they are going to be focused on two reactions that will be hidden: how to 1) save face and 2) get even. John will likely never discover how the contractor he yelled at 'saved face' with his peers, be it through a cutting retort behind John's back, or an act of sabotage at the construction site. Remember, low status employees get even—in ways that are undetected by the boss.

In Chapter Seven we'll explore the themes of retribution, retaliation and revenge

in detail.

The oblivious driver and the *reflexive* response

Let's take a first-person look at the link between inflammatory thinking, flooding and behavior through the following true story.

You are running late for an important appointment with a valued customer and your anxiety is increasing as you hit a series of red lights. At one red light, you watch with irritation as the driver immediately in front of you focuses her attention on the back seat. Sure enough, when the light changes, she doesn't notice. You tap your horn impatiently, but she ignores you. You can't believe what you're seeing as she gets out of her car, opens the back door and starts digging around in the back seat! Your heart starts to race and you look for an out, but an illegally parked delivery truck blocks the right lane. You start leaning on your horn, as you roll down your window and scream at her to move. She continues to ignore you but within one or two minutes she returns to her seat and drives away.

If you were to generate examples of blaming, inflammatory responses to this situation they would sound similar to, *"She's an idiot and got her license in a Cracker Jack box!" "She's putting on her make up." "She's a welfare cheat, with nothing to do and doesn't care that other people are busy." "She's rich and too uppity to care about others." "She's too stupid to realize the light has changed." "She's from Generation X and doesn't care about others." "She's old and senile." "She's a woman driver!" "She's an immigrant and doesn't care about our rules."*

During seminars I ask people to brainstorm examples of blame in response to this story and the energy in the room skyrockets. People are laughing and boisterous. The energy of blame is self-righteous and indignant.

If you analyze the list of reactions you'll notice that all of these statements are assumptions about the *person*. She is attacked for lack of intelligence, for her character, gender, economic status (too poor, or too rich) age (too young or too old) and ethnicity.

In inflammatory thinking we exaggerate the importance and severity of the other person's behavior and we typically assume that the trait is permanent. This is one of the primary reasons blaming responses don't work. They focus on people, who are unlikely or unable to change, not the problem. Consequently, we feel hopeless about finding a solution and thus the frustration seems insurmountable and unmerited. It's this *approach* to solving the problem that causes you to flood, not the problem itself.

I'm frustrated and it's *my* fault

Sometimes when we are frustrated, instead of blaming others we turn contempt inward and blame ourselves. This reaction is less visible. Most people publicly blame others, but privately berate themselves. However, depression comes from the same thinking pattern as hostility toward others--the arrow of blame just swings *inward*.

Figure 8. Frustration; arrow to depression

If you're stuck behind someone who's behaving in a seemingly irrational way and doesn't proceed when the light changes, you might initially react reflexively--with blame. However, later in the day, when the adrenaline and cortisol fade, your critical voices shred your self-esteem. In this thinking pattern responses sound similar to, *"Boy, I really lost it back there. I'm such a mindless jerk for getting angry over something so minor. My client was delayed too and she didn't even realize I was late."* Or, *"Jeez, I hope no one saw me screaming at the lady. I must have looked like that idiot on TV who punched the elderly driver. I'm such a loser."*

Some individuals resort to self-contempt immediately upon becoming frustrated.

"Why did I take this stupid route? I should have taken the expressway! I can't even drive to an appointment without getting behind some freaking, stuck car. My stupid luck."

Depression, work and health

Like hostility, depression has negative effects on health and productivity. A study by Geisinger Health Systems in Pennsylvania, and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers found approximately 9 percent of the work is affected by depression at any given time, but it is often invisible to bosses and coworkers. Depressed employees report losing more than 5 hours per week in reduced performance in the job due to fatigue, irritability and loss of focus. A study at Columbia University estimated that *one in five adolescents* - the workers of the future - are seriously depressed. Suicides within this age group have tripled since 1995.

Depression is considered a significant risk factor for heart disease in both men and women, and depression's toll on the body also translates into a sluggish immune system. Not only are depressed people more susceptible to colds and viruses, new studies on the immune system show that depression is a risk factor for cancer.

Our bodies produce approximately 200 imperfect cells a day. These cells are missing two characteristics. They do not have an identity, so the cell doesn't become functioning part of the brain, bone, etc., and they are missing a cap that says, *"Stop reproducing, you're complete."* Because of these flaws, these imperfect cells have the potential to develop into cancer.

However, a normal immune system will scan for these imperfect cells and destroy them. When the immune system is impaired by depression, this function is compromised and the risk for cancer increases. Not everyone who is depressed will get

cancer, and not everyone who has cancer was depressed (there are many cancer antecedents); however, depression is a risk factor, and individuals should be screened for it and treated.

Although some forms of depression are the result of chemical imbalance, harsh self-criticism is the other major contributor. Clearly we need to help individuals access the tools that bring relief.

Contemplate this data. *Cancer and heart disease are the two biggest killers in modern society, and you can substantially lower your risk for both of these diseases by paying attention to* ***how you think*** *when you face frustration.*

The stinky twins: blaming others and blaming self

Without awareness of these negative consequences, it is easy for blaming responses to become habitual reactions to frustration.

Contempt vacillates between blaming others (B.O.) which results in feelings of hostility, to blaming self (B.S.), which results in self-loathing and depression. I call blaming others and blaming self the stinky twins. They are twins because they consist of the same DNA, or thinking patterns: "I'm frustrated because of someone's stupidity!" The only difference between B.O and B.S. is the target of the blame. In B.O. the target is another person and in B.S. the target is ourselves.

I call the twins 'stinky' because, frankly, they stink! These two responses to frustration damage our relationships, health, momentum, and mood *and* they are 100% ineffective in solving problems. Hence, problems accumulate, weigh us down and lead to feelings of hopelessness and frustration.

Blaming others, which is anchored at the left end of the continuum, results in

anger and the energy of hostility. Blaming self, which is anchored in the middle of the continuum, results in loss of energy, or depression.

Targeting someone else is a quick antidote to harsh self-criticism. Pay attention to what highly critical people say when they make a mistake--their *self*-evaluations are chilling. They'll say things like, *"I'm so stupid! What an idiot! That's just like me! I'll never get this right!"*

When one aims their anger and hostility toward another person, they have energy. It may not feel good, but it's preferable to *not* having energy. Watch for this in your own moments of frustration. Do you vacillate between being angry and critical of others, and berating yourself? When you feel contempt for others, it may be in order to relieve the despair that accompanies self-loathing?

BO and BS were somewhat the same
Each one adept at resorting to blame
BO pointed fingers to preserve a good name
BS wrung hands in guilt and then shame.
Nancy Clemens

Once again, imagine the accumulated effect of these two thinking patterns over time. Remember. an average of thirty frustrations per day results in more than 750,00 in a lifetime! This level of frequency allows for plenty of opportunities to fall into invisible but counter-productive habits.

The flooded boss

To see how outer and inner blame are linked, imagine I'm a vice president who knows nothing about flooding and its dire consequences. I flood frequently—after all, once in awhile I *deserve* an outburst! I've earned it and you're not going to deny me my rights to express my indignation about sloppy work! I shouldn't have to put up with inefficiencies and laziness!

Figure 9. Blaming others, blaming self

During a hectic day, when nerves are frayed, one of my direct reports, Megan, warily tells me that her presentation to the executive team will have to be rescheduled because of problems in the database. I explode and tell her I've just about had it with her poor planning! Even if Megan's been warned about my 'hot temper' she will be insulted and hurt by my tirade. However, because of my ability to problem solve and listen is impaired, I will be in no condition to care about Megan's feelings or notice her reactions.

My tirade carries a big, hidden price. My irrational response will destroy her willingness to exceed my expectations for the sheer pleasure of pleasing someone she respects and trusts. Her passion, her opinion of me, and her pride in work are now at risk.

However, even more damage will result as a consequence of my self-righteous behavior. If I tend to vacillate between blaming others and blaming myself, after the cortisol and adrenaline fade, I will turn my contempt and inflammatory thinking on myself in the form of harsh self-criticism, *"I'm such a lousy supervisor. Why did I say that?! This is MY fault; she's only been here six months and I knew this assignment was a stretch for her. I should have paid more attention to her progress. I hope she doesn't resign—I'd hate to loose another direct report this year. I'm lousy at supervising people. I never should have taken this promotion. I never know when to let well enough alone."*

Blaming has turned on me. Now I feel terrible *and* I've lost my energy. Of the three reactions to frustration this is the worst. What's the quickest way to regain it? Blame someone! I can turn the arrow of blame toward the Information Technology

department or the person responsible for that particular database. Pumped out with renewed self-righteous indignation I stop the IT director in the hall, and make poorly informed accusations against her group, which angers the director and her staff. I might feel terrible, but now I have energy!

Ha! I could even use my anger toward them as a way of soothing over the situation with Megan. I could apologize to her and tell her the problem is really the incompetence of the IT group. Although she might buy my contriteness and feel relieved that she is no longer a target of my contempt, at a deeper, unexpressed level she will no longer trusts me.

The most tragic outcome of swinging back and forth between inner and outer blame is that the resulting isolation, hostility and self-criticism will keep me from focusing on the problem—the database is inaccurate. However, I have alienated the very people, including the IT department and Megan, who I need in order to solve the problem.

In addition, my hostile attacks will damage her morale and self-confidence making it more difficult for her to learn or solve the problem. She'll tell others about my hostile reaction and they will be empathic to her embarrassment by telling her *their* stories about run-ins with me.

At some level I know that I am the topic of office gossip. Now I am even more vulnerable to depression, and its twin, aggression. Why is the organization turning against *me?!*

Hostility and the fear of unworthiness

What causes hostility? Although many factors come into play, Dr. Williams concluded that cynicism, or a general mistrust of other people's motives fuels hostility.

Cynicism is not skepticism. Skepticism is occasional doubt, with specific individuals. Cynicism is negativity across the board, every situation, ever person. It's the attitude, "*I don't trust anyone but you and me, Dick, and I'm starting to worry about you!"* It's contempt *before* investigation.

Figure 10. Causes of heart disease

What causes cynicism? Think of the most cynical person you know. Does fragile self-esteem fit? Anger and cynicism help people fend off threats to their sense of self-worth.

James Gilligam, M.D. author of *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes,* has never seen a serious act of violence that was not "provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed." The U.S. Secret Service interviewed 40 boys involved in school shootings and found that many of them were persistently humiliated and harassed over long periods.

Rudeness and incivility have a toxic effect on individuals at work and in society at large because they are perceived as an attack on one's identity, self-concept or status. Consequently, individuals react with anger and a desire for revenge that is out of proportion to the initial behavior.

Hostility appears to be a smoke screen behind which people; hide their feelings of unworthiness; avoid feelings of worthlessness; and defend their identify.

Naomi Eisenberger, University of California, L.A. has found that social rejection affects the same region of the brain as physical injuries. Just as animals in pain respond aggressively, people in emotional distress lash out with angry outbursts.

Professor Jennifer Crocker at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, has found

that people who score high on self-esteem tests, but have unstable and *inflated* feelings of self-worth (not grounded in objective measures), are most likely to become hostile, defensive and aggressive when they are challenged or disappointed.

Individuals with contingent, or fragile, self-esteem base their feelings of worthiness on other people's opinions, and the success or failure of their efforts, moment to moment. Even though their esteem scores may score at average or above, when they are disappointed or confronted, they react with hostility and aggression, even violent aggression. Hostility can be a reaction to an extreme, underlying fear that others will judge us worthless. Hence, people with unstable self-esteem easily become defensive, unsupportive and non-empathic.

Naomi Eisenberger, University of California, L.A. has found that social rejection affects the same region of the brain as physical injuries. Just as animals in pain will respond aggressive, feelings of extreme discomfort may explain angry outbursts by individuals in emotional distress.

Nastiness can be a mask for a person's insecurities. Kindness penetrates that.

-Judy Orloff, M.D.

Imagine you have a very cynical direct report, Beatrice, who always complains about change. As you arrive at work she is ranting about a new software program.

If you decide that she is unappreciative of what it takes to stay in business, you will mirror her negativity and feel annoyed and impatient. Your attitude toward her will be quite obvious even if you try to hide it.

However, if you consider that her complaints might be due to lack of confidence or anxiety about not measuring up, your attitude might shift. Your reaction might be similar to, "Come on Beatrice, download the program and I'll walk you through the changes."

In dealing with defensive and blaming clients I always make the assumption that self-esteem is the core of issue. I assume that this person is fighting to defend their sense of self. This thought keeps me from getting hooked by their contempt. Instead I respond to their predicament with warmth. As you'll see later, if your goal is to bring about change, and not judge what is 'right,' kindness is much more effective than contempt.

The Rabbi and the Grand Dragon of the KKK

After I read Drs. Williams' and Crocker's work about the relationship between self-esteem and aggression I not only changed my own approach I began to look for examples of the link between fragile, unstable self-esteem and hostility.

There is an extraordinary example of this relationship between self-loathing and hostility in the true story of Larry Trapp, the former Grand Dragon of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Nebraska, and the Weisser family, who befriended him. This story, about a duel between positive and negative energy is one of the most enlightening chronicles of the last century. It's the basis of Kathryn Watterson's award winning book, *"Not by the Sword."*

If we are serious about reducing the amount of hostility in our world and workplaces, the Weisser story is loaded with insight.

Larry Trapp was an example of someone at the far left end of the hostility

continuum introduced in Chapter One. As Grand Dragon, Larry spent his days sending out hate mail and sponsoring racist videos on cable TV, and organizing and encouraging fellow Klansmen and other white supremacists to target, harm, and terrorize Blacks, Jews, Vietnamese and other Asians, Hispanics, Indians and Gays and Lesbians, particularly in Lincoln and surrounding areas.

For years he had been targeting and terrorizing families and individuals, particularly in his hometown of Lincoln.

Figure 11. Larry Trapp

Figure 12: Trapp in regalia

One of the families Larry Trapp terrorized was that of the local cantor and acting rabbi, Michael and his wife Julie Weisser. Larry called their house and threatened, *"You'll be sorry you ever moved into 5800 Randolph Street, Jew boy."* He sent hate mail and a note: "The KKK Is Watching YOU."

Michael and Julie are examples of individuals at the right end of the continuum—individuals who's warmth and skill combine in an extraordinary ability to transform destructive behavior.

Larry's first hate-filled call to the Weisser household shocked and angered Michael and Julie. But Michael was used to confronting prejudice and hostility in his work as spiritual leader of his synagogue. Over time, Michael's anger turned to curiosity, and later concern.

Michael began calling Larry and leaving messages that were meant to make Larry think about how irrational it is to build a worldview based on hatred and blame. Knowing that Larry was suffering from diabetes and confined to a wheelchair, Michael

would confront Larry with, *"I don't know why you worship Hitler, you would have been one of the first people he would have killed."*

Sometimes his messages were from Michael's heart, *"Larry, if you ever get tired of hating, there's a whole world of love waiting for you."*

Over time Michael and Julie tempered their conversations with warmth and offers of help. Larry's attitude shifted slightly. He wasn't used to warmth and kindness. It disarmed him.

After months of emotional phone calls, Michael received a call that was unlike any other. Larry said bluntly, *"I want to get out but I don't know how."* Larry was beginning to recognize the relationships we covered in previous sections; the link between hostility and health. *"I'm feeling confused and kind of sick. I think this is making me sick."* Michael asked if Larry wanted to talk and surprisingly, Larry acquiesced.

When Julie and Michael arrived at Larry's apartment, they were surprised and saddened by the reality of what lay behind the smokescreen of hostility. Larry was an unkempt, disheveled man, who had lost both of his lower legs to diabetes and was going blind. He was sitting alone in a barren, dirty apartment surrounded by guns, hate literature, bomb making supplies and Nazi and Klan paraphernalia..

Larry's rage kept introspection and depression at bay.

Kathryn Watterson
Not By the Sword

Michael reached out to shake hands with Larry and Larry began to sob. Underneath his misdirected rage, Larry was exhausted and feeling hopeless about his

barren life. His misery and isolation had been exacerbated by the energy he was investing in targeting and harassing others, and more importantly, it was blocking him from creating positive relationships with people who might befriend him.

Larry apologized repeatedly for his history of terrorizing and hurting others The next day, at great risk for his own safety, Larry renounced his membership and asked other Klan members to do the same. He then began a long process of reaching out to people he had harassed and asking for their forgiveness.

The local paper ran an article on the Trapp/Weisser story, which was picked up by the Associated Press, *The New York Times and Time Magazine*. Julie and Michael quietly continued to bring Larry meals and medicine and transport him to the doctor.

After months of trips between the two homes, it became clear that Larry was dying. Julie decided it would be much easier to care for him if he lived in their home. One of the Weisser's adolescent daughters moved into the basement and Larry took up residence in her former room.

Figure 13. Larry Trapp and Weisser Family

In response to this loving family Larry thrived. Eventually he asked Michael to teach him Hebrew. Before he died, Larry converted to Judaism.

Hostility brings relief from self-loathing

One of the most disturbing, yet revealing aspects of the Weisser/Trapp story occurred just before Larry's death. During his Klan days Larry claimed he hated African-Americans because he had been gang-raped by a group of black adolescents at reform school. However, his last confession to Julie, the one that was the most difficult for him to make, was that he hadn't been raped. As a young man he had consensual sex with a black male. Larry, who had been raised with intolerance and contempt, judged

himself mercilessly and turned his inner contempt into outer hatred for the sheer relief from self-loathing. This is a classic example of the cycle we discussed in the early pages of this chapter; the thinking patterns of "blame others" and "blame self," are linked. Again, we are watching someone trying to preserve a fragile sense of *worthiness.*

Shame, which is a condemnation of the person, rather than the behavior, is more likely to provoke anger towards others than change the offending behavior. Larry's story provides a rare opportunity to see extreme hostility for what it is; an attempt to escape unbearable criticism of self. Like most people who get caught in this trap Larry became increasingly anxious and depressed as he discovered that targeting and despising other people wasn't bringing him what they need most--affection and peace of mind.

When Larry met the Weissers he was at a turning point. His deteriorating health made it undeniably clear--he didn't have much time left to get it right. When Julie and Michael offered their sincere friendship Larry dropped his hostility in a heartbeat for an opportunity to heal.

Hostility collapses into hopelessness and despair

On a much less dramatic scale I have seen this exact dynamic many times while working with teams that are incapacitated by internal hostility and conflict. When I come into an organization to resolve conflict, team members are eager to cooperate. Their initial rush of hostility has invariably withered into a black hole of despair. Team members are exhausted from tension and ache for positive interactions and the respect of their supervisors, and peers.

When hostility is used as a primary means of generating passion it robs individuals, like Larry of their primary desire—achievement and camaraderie. In later

chapters we'll explore this in depth.

Without positive energy two dismal choices remain

There are only three options for energy: to have none (depression or indifference), to generate energy through hostility, or to build it through appreciation and achievement. When we fail to provide the conditions that create positive energy, or when we lack the skills to generate it, employees are left with two dismal choices. They either function *without* workplace energy, disconnected from the mission, and each other, or they target others as a means of stimulation and connection to members of their in-group. However, depression is so debilitating that it is the *least* preferred state, and therefore most groups facing this choice gravitate to the energy of hostility.

Employees that work in isolation are vulnerable to hostility because individuals will do almost anything to escape tedium. In fact, isolation is so punishing that solitary confinement is used as a deterrent in prisons. In low stimulus settings people are forced to make a choice between being energized by contempt and not being energized at all (the first and second columns of "Three Cultures at Work"). When we are forced to choose between these two alternatives we would rather have the stimulation of hostility than experience the under-arousal of depression.

This has been borne out in studies of security guards. To avoid facing a night of mind-numbing boredom, security workers create energy by playing nasty practical jokes, gossiping, and committing minor acts of sabotage.

In my work, I have yet to find anyone who *desired* to be energized by hostility. However, as Albert Einstein concluded, the energy of hostility can be created by anyone, while creating the energy of appreciation takes conscious commitment, skill and courage.

When leaders believe that creating climates of appreciation isn't a priority or worthy

of their time, I ask them which of the other two choices they'd prefer. Do they want their employees to create the energy of hostility by using gossip and ridicule to enliven an otherwise tedious day? Or, do they want employees to stop seeking energy from work, withdraw and disengage from the organization's mission? This question always causes even the most die-hard skeptics to rethink their position.

In addition, if you're a formal or informal leader, I have very bad news. Because leaders are visible and their role requires they make unpopular decisions they are among *the* most frequent targets of blame. When management tolerates blame they also become targets as their employees mirror they tendency to assume that every frustration is the result of a thoughtless clod.

If blame becomes the sugar high of your workgroup or organization, regardless of your competence and character, *you* will most certainly be one of many people who your group targets in your absence.

Sending the stinky twins to reform school

There is a third, superb and life sustaining option. In the next chapter we'll focus on the situation-based, problem solving response to frustration, return to the story of the oblivious driver, and examine the impact of positive emotions on health, relationships and effectiveness. Here you will find an abundance of good news. You'll also discover that when you lose interest in blaming others/blaming self, you'll make a dramatic shift toward better health, feelings of wellbeing, effectiveness, and self-confidence.

During seminars, individuals are riveted to the information about flooding, the medulla, cortex, heart disease, inner and outer contempt. However, there is a palpable sense of relief as we turn our attention to the *positive* thinking patterns that sustain individuals, protect health, motivate groups and maximize accomplishments.

Although we are mesmerized by climates of fear, ridicule and defensiveness they cannot sustain us. For optimal, long-term performance we must be in environments where our energy can be continuously renewed.

Our longings for positive workplaces are reliable and ancient, for it is within healthy communities that we realize our best health, creativity and achievements.

> "*I don't know what to say*," Larry said between more tears. *"I've been so terrible to you and to so many people. I can't believe I hated you so much. How can you ever forgive me?"*
>
> *"We do forgive you,"* Julie said. *"We do."*
>
> *"I don't know what, but I . . . I just feel different*." Larry said, putting the palm of his hand on his stomach. *"I've never felt like this before."*
>
> *Not by the Sword*
> Kathryn Watterson

Chapter Three

Curiosity Makes You Smart, Sexy and Successful: The Most Important Habit You Bring to the Table

The arrival of a good clown exercises a more beneficial influence upon the health of a town than the arrival of twenty asses laded with drugs.

-John Sydenham
17th-century physician

Well, OK, maybe reflective reactions don't really make us sexier, but they do make us more effective, knowledgeable and respected. Giving people the benefit of the doubt when things aren't going well, and resisting the urge to flood or become indignant endears us to others When we make a mistake it is likely they will reciprocate our composure.

In contrast, people who use the blaming response covered in Chapter Two, assume an incompetent, immoral or insensitive *person* lies at the root of our distress, and their irrational, destructive responses erode their reputations and integrity.

When we use the *reflexive* response we assume someone else's characteristics are the cause of *our* discomfort. We scan their personality, age, ethnicity, gender, occupation, etc., to pinpoint their responsibility in our frustration. It's as if we are saying, *"WHOSE fault is this? A mindless idiot is making my life miserable*!"

This reaction is common when people feel overwhelmed. However, it is paralyzing and destructive. In addition to the health risks covered in Chapter Two, reflexive reactions impair our ability to solve problems in any meaningful way. Because we assume the problem lies within someone else's characteristics, we feel like powerless victims without solutions. No wonder this thinking pattern causes flooding!

In contrast, when we use the situational-orientation we search the ***situation*** for the

source of the problem. *"WHAT is causing their behavior? What could be going on?"* In this response we assume that the other person ***is reasonable***, and once we know the whole story, their behavior will make sense. We may not agree with the other person's actions, but we assume that the other party is responding to something in their environment of which we are unaware. This assumption shapes the manner in which we approach the individual and our chances for success.

Figure 14: 750,000 Frustrations: Arrow to Reason

When we engage in *reflective* thinking we utilize the **cortex**, the problem-solving center of the brain. Reflective thinking is more rationale and less volatile. It considers options and possibilities. Rather than feeling indignant we become *curious* about the reasons for the other party's behavior,. This attitude brings us closer to the heart rhythms of appreciation from Chapter One, which are associated with increased creativity and mental clarity.

Instead of attacking the competence and character of others, or withdrawing to avoid confrontation, a reflective stance leads us to seek out the other party, open the dialogue, and ask for their assistance in understanding. This reaction has multiple benefits to physical health, effectiveness, mood and the ability to maintain relationships.

Roosevelt; reflective, analytical, effective

Roosevelt is a well-known political leader who faced a staggering economic crisis but approached it with a radically different approach than his nemeses in Europe, Hitler. Roosevelt looked at the situation as a problem with the financial regulations underlying the banking industry and stock market. As a result, he passed more legislation in his first 100 days in office than any president before him.

Roosevelt and Hitler give us a dramatic snapshot of the impact of these two thinking

patterns; blaming people versus looking to the situation, structures, pressures and limitations as the source of problems.

Figure 15. Frustration; Roosevelt

Let's also return to the true story from Chapter Two about Tony, and his boss's decision to move the plant to South Carolina. After the surprise announcement most of Tony's colleagues went on a 'search for stupidity' about whom to blame for the relocation. Their bodies flooded with cortisol, adrenaline, and their thinking was dominated by self-righteousness. However, this reaction destroys the ability to problem-solve. In addition, as they alienated the people they targeted (engineering, marketing, the owner), their reactions damaged the relationships they needed to regain their momentum and solve the problem--finding new employment.

Contrast their *reflexive*, personality-based reactions with Tony's calm, *reflective* response. After making the rounds to various departments, Tony went back to his office, closed the door, updated his resume, and wrote several cover letters. About an hour later he went out to chat with his legal assistant and realized his colleagues were still clustered about, complaining angrily about the sudden turn of events. He was dumbfounded that they were wasting precious time, instead of getting down to task.

The contrast of Tony's reaction to those of his colleagues can be explained by Tony's thinking. Instead of awfulizing, he accepted the corporate closing as an unfortunate, but not catastrophic, event. Instead of blaming the president or other departments, Tony assumed the owner had substantive reasons to move his company to another part of the country.

In fact, within a year of the move, Tony learned that his former boss had died from cancer. Although Tony was unable to confirm it, he suspected that the president

returned home in anticipation of his declining health. While many of Tony's colleagues assumed that the cause of the closing was someone's fault--engineering, marketing, the boss--Tony assumed there was a reason, albeit, hidden. This assumption allowed him to stay calm, relaxed and focused on task. It also allowed him to maintain relationships that he otherwise would have lost needlessly.

Tony's ability to stay composed and effective was the result of his ability to look at the *situation* as the source of the problem, not various people.

Tony's superb control over his reactions to frustration and his automatic responses allowed him to optimize an unexpected, negative event. Tony maintained his momentum, relationships and effectiveness during a period that others found debilitating.

Let's return to a different example, that of Rhonda, the anxious V. P. of sales from the previous chapter. If she uses a situational-orientation, and assumes there's a reason operations is behind, she will start searching for causes in their systems or processes. Rather than starting a rumor about Ted, the VP of Operations, and attacking his competence, Rhonda will move in the opposite direction, and approach Ted directly to learn about his constraints. In fact, she will search for ways to help Ted out of his predicament. As you'll see in Chapter Six, the odds are on our side when we make the assumption that workplace problems really reflect problems in systems, roles or inadequate information.

This reaction has multiple additional benefits. By sidestepping the opportunity to promote herself at Ted's expense Rhonda won't get ensnared in a debilitating power struggle with Ted. In addition, by learning about Ted's constraints and gathering data, she may be able to minimize the impact of the backlog on her group. Helping Ted resolve his productivity issues rather than personally benefiting from his problems—at the expense of their organization's profitability—will send a significant signal to her peers about her

character. If Rhonda and Ted look for problems in the context of work rather than personalities they will most likely uncover system problems that they then will have the opportunity to resolve.

Ted will be relieved and grateful if Rhonda *doesn't* use his department's crisis as an opportunity to increase her status at his expense. Ted will be very likely to reciprocate her professionalism at a later date when Rhonda's group misses a quota or experiences a shortfall. It is these kinds of positive reactions to a crisis that bond workers to each other, make work exciting, energizing and meaningful.

The oblivious driver and the reflective reaction

Let's return to the true story of the 'Oblivious Driver' and contrast the reflective, or problem solving reaction to the blame reactions we used earlier. In the personality-based reactions you assumed the woman who wasn't moving after the light changed was too stupid or selfish to care about anyone but herself.

If, instead, you use a reflective, situational-based approach when the woman opens the back door of her vehicle, you'll assume there's a *reason* why she's focused on the back seat.

If you speculate that the unyielding driver has a legitimate *motive* for her behavior (in contrast to an inflammatory, personality-based approach) you will be able to avoid flooding with anger and adrenaline. It's likely you won't shift into the medulla, the fight or flight center of the brain. Instead, you'll utilize the cortex, the source of creativity and problem resolution.

Thinking reflectively, from the cortex, allows situational possibilities to surface. It's similar to asking, *"Why would a **reasonable** person have her attention on the back seat rather than driving?"* The possibilities are limitless. *"The pizza fell on the floor." "She's*

lost and her map is in the back of her car." "A baby needs a bottle." "She has asthma (or diabetes) and she's looking for her medication." "She flicked a cigarette out the window, it blew back in, and it's burning the back seat." "She's tending to an elderly person who's ill."

During a seminar when people switch from personality-based thinking to a situational-orientation they stop ridiculing the driver and joking at her expense. They become more reflective and concerned, and I can watch the influence of the cortex on their behavior. Individuals become empathic and start telling stories about similar experiences from their own lives. The energy created in this reflective mood is dramatically different than the self-righteous, aggressive energy of blame. This thinking patter engenders compassion and a desire to be of assistance, rather than contempt.

Bibs

As I mentioned earlier, this is a true story. The driver who was focused on the back seat of her car wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper because she was determined to tell her side of the story.

The reason she didn't move her vehicle when the light changed was because her toddler, who was riding in the back seat, was choking! In her letter she explained the man behind her had flooded and began blowing his horn as she frantically tried to clear her toddler's throat. Of course she ignored the green light. Any frantic parent would behave in a similar manner.

Her experience is a perfect example of the deficits of a personality-based approach and the kind of emotions and behavior it elicits. *When we are flooded with hostility, we are not only useless; we often make the problem worse.*

In Chapter Four there are additional stories of hidden realities, similar to this

one. I call hidden realities "babies in the back seat." In the workplace hidden realities can be materials shortages, lack of information, process problems, budget cuts, union constraints, safety restrictions, etc.

An easy way to remember the three assumptions is to remember that the reflexive reactions are the stinky twins, B. O. (blame others) and B. S. (blame self) and the reflective response is BIBS or "baby in the back seat." These terms are used as lighthearted, shorthand messages, or code within teams and organizations.

Figure 16. 750,000 Frustrations; B.O., B.S., B.I.B.S.

More than once a CEO has told me that he uses the phrase, "baby in the back seat" to avoid flooding or shooting the messenger. The term can help you remember to look for "why" not "who."

When teams and individuals face a crisis, it's not the amount of external stress that distinguishes healthy organizations from toxic ones. It's not the business climate, profitability, the competition, or the severity of the predicament. I've consulted in organizations that were enjoying tremendous profits but were unable to retain their people because their climates were riddled with blame. I've also been in organizations where they were literally closing facilities and yet former employees had nothing but good things to say about the way they were treated and the reasons their facility closed.

The pivotal difference lies in the organization's cultural response to frustration. If your organization or team is able to face aggravations without blaming others, you'll pull together during stressful times and optimize your opportunities.

If you or your team resort to reflexive, inflammatory responses, and assume that every inconvenience is proof of another party's incompetence, then even minor events will trigger blame and mistrust, and generate competing, negative factions. You will alienate

other departments, and waste valuable assets on power struggles and mistrust.

Later we'll look at these responses in more detail, but I want to return to the discussion about emotions and health. If hostility and depression have negative impacts on health, does appreciation have a positive effect? If it does, organizations would be wise to promote it.

The health and happiness benefits of appreciation and affection

As we saw in Chapter Two, hostility gives us a 'sugar-high' energy, but it comes with a hefty price tag of diminished health. Blame leads to social isolation, which often results in depression. We also know that isolation and depression carry health risks. Fortunately, at the positive end of the continuum where we placed feelings of affection or love, all the news about health effects is good. Larry Dossey, M. D. puts it succinctly, "*Love is intimately related to health*."

Research using magnetic resonance imaging by Dr. Gregory Berns, a psychiatrist at Emory University in Atlanta, found that when participants cooperated while playing a laboratory game the mental circuitry normally associated with reward-seeking behavior became active. In other words, cooperation feels *good.*

Feelings of affection occur when we are part of a tightly knit group, bonded by loyalty and fun. This end of the continuum includes the joy of accomplishment, love for family members, faith and spiritual practices, respect and appreciation for colleagues and mentors, supervisors, satisfaction from a customer, the joy of recognition, camaraderie, and the satisfaction of helping others achieve their goals.

Love is intimately linked to health

You probably know individuals who are energized by love. Their faces become more beautiful, even as their bodies age. It lends another interpretation to Coco Chanel's phrase, "By the time you're 50 you have the face you deserve." Her observation is true not only for people whose lives are consumed by hostility and cynicism, but also for people who thrive on love and appreciation.

Although there is less research in the area of health and love than in the field of health and hostility, interesting data is accumulating. For instance, researchers scanning emergency room data discovered that heart attack victims who arrived at the hospital with family or friends were three times more likely to survive than people who came in alone.

In a study by Stanford University psychiatrist David Spiegel, women with terminal breast cancer were divided into two groups. One of the groups met twice a week to talk about their fears, and receive support from other patients. In the final stages of the disease, they developed into a tightly knit community and their friendships extended beyond their scheduled meetings.

Spiegel waited two years to analyze his final data and said, "I almost fell off my chair when I read the study's outcomes." The group that developed an intense connection lived twice as long as the group without support. A small, non-chemical intervention had significantly prolonged the lives of the women in the support groups. Being in community not only elevates our mood it has a measurable impact on our bodies.

Caring is biological.
Dr. James Lynch
University of Maryland's School of Medicine

Another surprise finding occurred when researchers were testing rabbits for the potency of arteriosclerosis drugs. Although all the rabbits were subjected to high fat diets,

the ones that received daily petting from a kindhearted laboratory technician had significantly lower levels of the disease.

Affection and the immune system

Remember the experiment from Chapter Two, where hostility negatively affected immune systems? The same researchers also asked students to focus for five minutes on someone they loved, or a peak experience. Their immune systems functioned at a higher level for *six hours* after five minutes of relaxing into the energy of appreciation. If this dramatic impact on the immune system is found with people who are just *remembering* a hostile or positive experience, imagine the impact when we are experiencing these events in real life!

Since I've learned about this research finding I've adopted a ritual. In the morning, before I get out of bed, and at night, before I fall asleep, I consciously think of someone I love, or things for which I am grateful. These two, five-minute periods in combination boost my immune system for a total of 12 hours! It feels *wonderful,* and during a Minnesota winter, generating feelings of appreciation is as easy as thinking about the thermostat for the furnace that automatically turns up the heat before I get out of bed. I gained an unexpected return. I began to feel the energy of appreciation throughout the day. I used to struggle with frequent head colds that lasted for months, but since I adopted this practice six or seven years ago I've only had a couple of colds and they disappeared within a few days. I attribute my increased immunity to this simple practice.

This assumption was confirmed by an experiment conducted at the University of Pittsburg. Volunteers allowed the researchers to place a cold virus in their nostrils. Individuals who described themselves as "happy and relaxed" came down with colds at 1/3 the rate of people who were the least likely to use those words.

The helper's high

Allan Luks, the director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of New York, teamed up with Howard Andrews, a biopsychologist, to investigate the effect of volunteer work on health. They found that many people who volunteer on a regular basis experienced an increase in endorphins, the body's pleasure chemical. Luks dubbed this the "helper's high." It's very similar to the runner's high, except with an additional advantage. At the end of a run, endorphins drop rapidly resulting in a slide to fatigue. However, with the helper's high there are "long lasting feelings of euphoria, followed by relief from symptoms like lupus and arthritis."

Luks also found that although people have the biggest endorphin reaction when they do volunteer work, he also found health is positively affected by simple acts of kindness, such as pitching in to help a colleague meet a deadline. I think about this physiological reaction as nature's message: do more of this. It's enhances survival, feelings of wellbeing and health. Our bodies are "wired' of feel the best, when we are in positive energy.

The following short story, written by Elaine Gale of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, beautifully portrays how a small act of kindness has the power to change our moods.

Help across a two-way street

"I stepped off the bus on my way home from work, brow furrowed, smothering under snow and seasonal obligations. The pressure of the holidays had sunk my mood.

Glaring at the pod of riders clamoring to get on the bus I had just exited, I ran into an elderly woman whose boot had stuck in a chunk of ice. Off-balance and scared, she looked up from under her green hat and asked plaintively, "Will you help me?"

"Of course!" I said, and took her arm, freed her boot, escorted her through the throng, over the icy sidewalk and across the steep drifts to the corner. Then, safely across the street,

she touched my arm and said, “Thank you for your help.”

Her words should have been mine. The opportunity to help her had thawed my reserve and warmed my spirit. She’d asked for my help, but it turned out I’d needed hers too.”

Wealth and wellbeing; John D. Rockefeller

The following story about John D. Rockefeller, Sr. is a vivid example of the impact of positive and negative energy on health. Rockefeller worked relentlessly until his early 30’s when he earned his first million. Ten years later he was at the head of the world’s largest business and became a billionaire at age 53.

However, Rockefeller’s business practices were so ruthless that he made many enemies during his quest for extreme wealth. Oil field workers hanged him in effigy and he was in such fear of his life that he needed full time bodyguards. Rockefeller could barely eat or sleep. He developed alopecia, a condition that results in the loss of body hair. He was so weak that his doctors predicted he’d only live another year.

Then, perhaps because of dismal forecasts for his health, he began to give his money away. Through the Rockefeller Foundation he funded hospitals, universities and missions. He used his wealth for research that led to cures for tuberculosis, malaria, diphtheria and hookworm.

As his life became more altruistic, Rockefeller’s health improved. He was able to reestablished healthy patterns of eating and sleeping and regained his vitality. He continued his legacy of philanthropy until he died decades later at 98.

We are wired to be connected to each other in relationships of affection and emotional safety, and we are intrinsically motivated to seek out feelings of well being through acts of kindness. Consequently, I have found the most miserable people in the

workplace are those who are cut off from the feelings of camaraderie through conflict or isolation.

Once you train your mind to generate feelings of appreciation, it will affect your relationships, mood and effectiveness, regardless of your circumstances. You can generate these feelings on a crowded airplane, during a tense meeting with a vendor, or backed up in traffic. As you'll see in Chapter Nine it won't make you less effective. It will make you *more* so. Once you "wire" your brain to avoid flooding and hostility and see the world through the lens of abundance and the benefits will spill over to strangers, colleagues and customers.

I call the ability to do this, "riding the wave of appreciation." Like Bruce, the Vietnam Veteran at the beginning of Chapter Two it means you can create feelings of serenity at will.

While I was consulting at a metropolitan law firm I'd stop at a snack shop for my morning cup of coffee. The little shop was always jammed with workers grabbing their morning beverage and racing to beat the clock. The gaunt, tattooed man behind the counter handled each customer with military efficiency but without making the briefest eye contact or displaying the smallest gesture of warmth. As I waited in line I'd always try to notice something about him on which I could give him a positive comment as he rang up my purchase.

One morning he said to me gruffly, "You're *always* in a good mood. What's *wrong* with you?"

I laughed but I *feel* what he noticed—I'm almost always in a good mood and I understand how this can be puzzling and slightly annoying to others. Like Bruce I *learned* to generate feelings of wellbeing. Learning the tools in this book and shifting my focus to

what I appreciate about any given moment have helped me develop a more rewarding, healthy and effective outlook. When we focus occasionally on what's going right, our bodies relax into a sense of wellbeing that benefits every aspect of our lives.

There are many reasons to become skilled at creating feelings of appreciation, altruistic behavior and reflective reactions to frustration. The outcomes of your responses to frustration accumulate over your lifetime. Your reactions have an enormous impact on your mood and the viability of your relationships. They not only affect your success at work but also the quality of personal life and whether or not individuals are available to support you during a personal or professional crisis.

In combination, these factors are a significant asset, or a serious impediment, to your career.

Anna Maravelas is a corporate peacemaker, author of "How to Reduce Workplace Conflict and Stress" (Career Press, 2005) and founder of TheraRising, Inc., in St. Paul, Minnesota. Anna has improved productivity and profits, resolved conflict and restored trust in client organizations for more than 20 years. Case studies and client ROI calculations are available.

Anna is internationally recognized for her ability to transform negative cultures into climates of respect, fiscal responsibility and pride. She has a graduate degree in psychology with additional training in system thinking and process mapping. Anna studied conflict resolution at Harvard Law School's Negotiation Project.

Her groundbreaking strategies have appeared in *The New York Times, Forbes, The American Bar Association Journal, Harvard Management Update, O: The Oprah Magazine, Franchise Times, Healthcare Risk Management, the American Management Association Journal, Training Magazine and Continental Air*.

The combination of Anna's unique insights, unforgettable stories, humor and warmth results in a delightful ability to convey profound insights in an entertaining and moving manner. Your audiences will be captivated by her wisdom and charm.