Frustrated?
Understanding, avoiding, and coping with frustration

By Tamara Mitchell

Do you have some frustrations or pet peeves that are bothering you? We want to help you understand the underlying nature of frustration, discuss common responses to frustration, share some research that's been done, and provide information about dealing with frustration. Why should ergonomists be concerned about this issue? Frustration is one of many psychological factors which contribute to physical problems, it is an internal negative emotion, it can be fairly invisible to others, and there is definitely something you can do to alleviate it and the associated physical effects. We can help you organize your work area, but unless you tackle the mental "thorns in your side", you will continue to be at risk for strain injuries.

Behavior theorists define frustration as an obstacle blocking satisfaction of a need or goal.[1] Merriam-Webster defines frustration as a feeling of discouragement, anger, and annoyance because of unresolved problems or unfulfilled goals, desires, or needs.[2] Typically, the emotion associated with frustration involves *anxiety*. There are several characteristics of frustration, which appear in psychology literature:[1,4,5]

- The obstacles preventing us from a goal can be external or internal. External obstacles can be social - involving the actions of other people - or they can be environmental, such as a locked door.[1] Internal obstacles involve deficiencies in us, such as waning abilities to see, hear, or remember. Interestingly, when people are asked what really peeves them most, they describe a social obstacle - what someone has done or failed to do. There is a special attribute in social obstacles that is lacking in other types of obstacles. That attribute is *intent*. The other person is perceived to have "done it on purpose". So it is no surprise that research has found "*What frustrates people most is other people*".[1]

- Level of frustration is relative to the importance of the goal. If the goal is not important to an individual, the obstacle and resulting frustration will be less.

- Distance to the goal is a factor in frustration. Frustration is generally greater if a goal is narrowly missed than if it was "missed by a mile".[4] For example, it is known that silver medalists are generally a lot less happy than bronze medalists.

- The emotional reaction to frustration inhibits the ability to deal with the frustrating event. As a result, the individual must cope with anger and frustration in addition to the original problem.[1,5] Often the emotion of frustration is a larger

obstacle than the problem itself. If you are running late and get stuck in traffic, the anxiety and sometimes anger can be much more of a problem than the actual situation. If you were to relax, listen to some nice music, be grateful for some time for yourself, and calmly go with the flow of traffic, you would avoid all the anxiety and you would get there in the same amount of time!

- Managing emotions is a full-time job. Success depends on the situation, personal temperament, emotion-management skills, and the management approach. In many cases we have minimal control over the situation or our temperament, so managing our emotional response is key to coping with the frustrating event.[3]
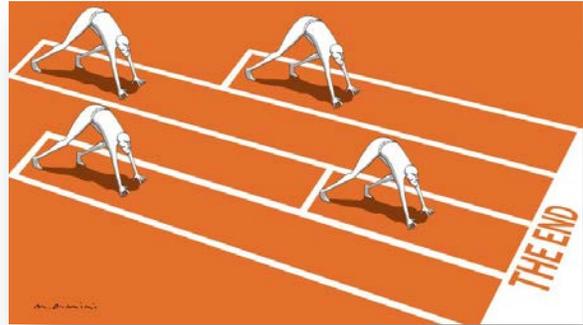
- Frustration is generally proportional in context to other people.[1] This can be dependent upon whether things seem to be fair relative to others, whether others are also frustrated, or whether someone feels singled out.

- Similarly, frustration is often related to the amount of control that someone feels they have in the situation. If there is little sense of control, the person usually feels powerless to change the situation. This is also a common source of stress.

- Frustration is cumulative. Tolerance to frustrating situations increases or decreases based on preceding incidences.[1] If someone has had to deal with several frustrating situations, the next small frustration may put them over the edge, even when the last obstacle would not have bothered them in an isolated instance.

- It takes minutes, hours, or days for the body to recover from a stressful event. The recovery time is dependent upon the obstacle and level of frustration (i.e., the individual's response to the event). Recovery is facilitated by removing the person from the frustrating environment.

There is a body of research related to the theory of Self-Determination and the satisfaction or frustration of what are considered basic needs: [6]
- Autonomy – the experience of having choices and of having control or voluntary action.
- Competence – the experience of a sense of effectiveness in interacting with one's environment
- Relatedness – the experience of love and care by significant others

When these basic needs are satisfied, the person has a sense of wellbeing and as these needs are fulfilled, it becomes somewhat a stockpile of resilience that enables the person to endure other setbacks.[6] On the other hand, when these needs are thwarted, it often results in a sense of ill-being and eventually a wide range of pathological behaviors and thinking patterns.[6]

This theory isn't too different from a more general definition of Frustration, but it does leave out individual *wants* and *goals*, which are not universal *needs*. Obstacles of wants and goals may still

lead to agitation and possibly undesirable thinking and behaviors when their accomplishment is hindered.

Responses to Frustration

The level of emotional reaction depends to some degree on the ability to manage emotions. Failure to manage emotions can result in decreased productivity, inability to pay attention and to learn, injury to cooperative relationships, increased personal stress and depression, addiction, and other health problems.[1, 2]

Anger. Frustration is the most common precursor to and possibly elicitor of anger.[7] It is also associated with aggression and with stress.

Escape, withdrawal and apathy can also be responses to frustration.

Aggression in response to frustration can be in the form of ***direct aggression*** expressed toward the object or person perceived as the source of frustration. A machine might be kicked or a person might be verbally threatened or pushed. Even verbally assaulting a person under your breath is direct aggression in cases where overt aggression may seem too threatening.[8]

Displaced aggression is often used when the source of the frustration is too powerful or threatening for direct aggression. If someone is frustrated by their boss, they may take it out on someone whom they do not feel threatened by, such as a co-worker, spouse, child, or friend. Displaced aggression can result in a whole chain of aggression. The person who has taken the brunt of displaced aggression may in turn release their frustrations to people down the pecking order.

Need substitutes may be sought when needs are not met, the person is made to feel insecure, and extrinsic goals are used to bolster up a person's appearance of worth.[6] These may be goals such as seeking popularity, attractiveness, or the appearance of material wealth.[6] Satisfaction through these substitutes isn't long-lasting and they interfere with actual need satisfaction. More anxiety, potential drug use, behaviors that are competitive, aggressive, and discriminatory are all associated with seeking need substitutes and come with personal, social, and societal costs.[6] It appears that the pursuit of extrinsic goals is on the rise as a societal trend, which is troubling.

Compensatory behaviors encompass three classes of behaviors:[6]
- Releasing self-control (binge eating, alcohol abuse, and even self-injury) where the individual stops trying to control their urges, possibly in an effort to comfort ones self.
- Rigid behavioral patterns are compulsive-type behaviors that provide a feeling of structure, predictability, and security. Unfortunately, this leads to a type of perfectionism that makes the person constantly feel like a failure when they cannot maintain the standards they have set up for themselves and adds to the feeling of needs frustration.

- Oppositional defiance involves direct opposition to any type of control and defiance of authority figures.[6] This is usually discussed in terms of teenagers from need-thwarting homes and this behavior can become a pathway to aggression, especially if oppositional defiance is combined with release of self-control.[6]

Positive responses: alternate approaches/alternate goals. Responses to frustration do not have to be destructive or negative. They can be constructive. One of these responses is persistence; continued trying and increased effort. Trying alternate or different approaches to reach the same goal is another possible positive response to frustration, that is "going around" the obstacle. Consulting with others who are experienced in reaching the desired goal is another constructive response to frustration. And finally, having alternate goals is a constructive response, so that if reaching one goal fails, there is another goal to shoot for. This generally involves advance planning which may not always be an option. [8]

Research

Work Style and Frustration.
Work style is defined as how work is performed. It is the manner or intensity in which a given individual meets the demands of a task. Research shows that stress coupled with individual characteristics, leads to symptoms of ill health and disease. It appears that work style is a differentiating factor in those who experience symptoms and those who do not.[9] In other words, for people experiencing equal levels of stress, those who have an intense work style are more apt to experience poor health than those who have a less intense work style. If frustration causes anger, aggression and stress, it is logical to assume that this, in turn, would lead to a predisposition to injuries since these things have a direct effect upon a person's work style.

User-interaction research attempting to test different algorithms for studying user interfaces, used mouse pressure as a measure of frustration in subjects in at least two studies. Eight pressure sensors were placed on an ordinary mouse. Subjects were subjected to an extremely frustrating computer interaction. The researchers measured and compared mouse pressure before and after the frustrating event. It was determined that mouse pressure was a very reliable measure of frustration, so it was used in both studies to test the user interface algorithms.[10,11]

What this means to ergonomists is that people are gripping the mouse more tightly when they are frustrated. Gripping the mouse tightly is a very damaging action for the hand. It decreases circulation and stresses the tendons, nerves, and muscles in the hand. Over time, this is likely to lead to repetitive strain injuries. Force and gripping lead to strain injuries. If frustration leads to force and gripping, it follows that you are more likely to injure yourself when you are frustrated. It indicates that work style, when a person is frustrated, is sometimes exhibited as force and gripping, which does directly affect the health of the individual.

Person-machine and Social Interaction During Frustration.
It has been shown that people naturally tend to relate to machines as if they were other people.[12] People interact with media, especially computers, with the same expectations and social rules as in dealing with other people. A controlled study was conducted to investigate human-computer interactions.[1] Various social, emotional feedback strategies were presented by a computer to relieve users' frustration. A computer interaction system was devised that successfully elicited

frustration. In one group, people were not given an opportunity to express their feelings about the frustrating computer interaction at all. A second group was given the opportunity to vent their feelings to the computer. And a third group was given an opportunity to start venting, but then the computer would start interacting by providing feedback to their emotions based on theories of active listening. It was found that the group who received feedback from the computer experienced significantly less frustration than the other two groups and, additionally, they were found to perform better. Interestingly, too, there was no significant difference between males and females in this regard.


Positive social interaction with a computer can alleviate frustration and humans may benefit emotionally from computers that respond in socially appropriate ways. It is also interesting to note that self-reports of frustration obtained during this study were so unreliable as to be useless, compared to the behavioral measures (how long they voluntarily played a frustrating game a second time). Self-reported level of anger was extremely low despite routine reports of high frustration levels. The researcher proposed that this might possibly due to the social desirability factor that anger and loss of control are a sign of weakness.

The results of this study are important to us in several ways. It indicates ways to improve harmony in interactions between cooperative parties, whether human or machine. One's ability to think creatively and generate solutions to one's own problems may be increased when this interaction model is used. And it is likely that it would decrease the chances that subsequent annoying situations would be seen as frustrating over time, possibly improving one's sense of autonomy and self-control.

Locus of Control and Frustration.
The concept of Locus of Control is also relevant to this discussion. Locus of control refers to an individual's belief about what causes certain outcomes. Those with an *internal locus of control* feel that they have considerable control over the outcomes in their lives. Success and failure is a function of one's ability and effort. Those with an *external locus of control* feel that outside forces, such as luck or fate, exert considerable control over the outcomes in their lives. "Internals"

It's all the luck of the draw

I'm the superhero of my destiny
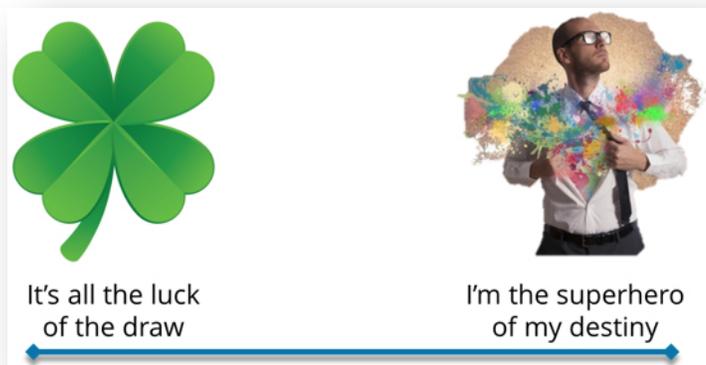
tend to perform better on academic tasks than externals. Internals also have more effective coping strategies, which leads to better psychological adjustment and reduces the negative health effects associated with high stress.[13] A similar scale was developed, called Health Locus of Control.[14] This is a measure of people's beliefs that their health is or is not determined by their own behavior and it was developed because medical professionals were continuously emphasizing the importance

of the patient's active role in his or her own health care. People who believe that their health is a matter of fate, not within their own control, or that they can only do what their doctor tells them to do, have an external health locus of control. Medical staff were, in effect, trying to get patients to adopt an internal locus of control without knowledge that this theory even existed.

Locus of Control is relevant to the discussion of frustration because, as previously mentioned, frustration is often related to the amount of control that someone feels they have in the situation. If there is little sense of control, the person usually feels powerless to change the situation. This is also a common source of stress. For this reason, it is likely that people who rate highly on the external locus of control, or health locus of control scale, will tend to feel more frustrated and potentially more anxious or angry, than those who are have an internal locus of control. In addition, internals are less likely to take responsibility for their own health, and thereby less likely to try to take precautions to avoid Repetitive Strain Injuries, to treat the early warning signs, or to use self-care when experiencing symptoms of RSI. These are people who will continuously seek help from medical authorities, try lots of different types of "ergonomic" equipment, but still cease to realize that the primary source of their pain is through their own actions and overworking the same muscles, nerves and tendons every day.

Dealing with Your Own Frustration

How about expanding our original definition of frustration? Frustration is the condition of wanting something and not getting it, or not wanting something and having it forced on you.[15] Frustration can be a result of interactions with machine or person, or environmental factors such as a locked door or a flat tire. Other people or situations do not *cause* frustration and anger. Frustration is how you react to the person or the situation. It is your *emotional response* to the situation. Frustration is a learned behavior.[15,16]

You cannot always change the things that happen, but you can change the way you react to them. You *can* learn a new way of reacting to situations if you want to. This is easier for some than others, however. Everyone experiences frustration, but some people are more easily angered by the situation due to their lower tolerance for frustration.[17] They feel that they should not have to be subjected to inconvenience or annoyance, have difficulty taking things in stride, and are particularly infuriated when a situation seems unjust to them. Unfortunately, some of these people use this as an excuse to be angry.

There are several steps on the road from frustration to anger defined by Hauck.[15] He states the first step as "I want something" and the second step as, "I didn't get what I wanted and I'm frustrated". By dividing the second step (i.e., First, you did not get what you want. Next, you feel frustrated.), we find an answer for dealing with frustration! It is actually possible to head off frustration rather than trying to manage your reaction to it after it happens.

Develop a better coping style
Considering the multiple sources of frustration as listed by Maltz and Barker, there are several suggestions for preventing frustrating situations.[16] We encourage you to develop and nurture a

personal style that fosters a calm, capable, and systematic approach to life.   (Don't laugh, this is a process and it is worth it to keep trying!)   This is how you will be able to lower your risk for chronic pain.

- **Believe that you are capable of handling the problem or situation.**[16] If you have a strong sense of self-respect, you will not as easily feel overwhelmed by challenging situations or people in positions of power.
- **Be persistent and believe in a solution.** Don't give up too soon or take a negative attitude that something cannot be done. Thomas Edison said, "Many of life's failures are men who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up".[18] He also said, "Nearly every man who develops an idea works at it up to the point where it looks impossible, and then gets discouraged. That's not the place to become discouraged."[18] Edison tested more than 6,000 Plant fibers from all over the world to find a filament that didn't burn out in the light bulb.[19]
- **Diminish the power of the problem.**[16] Give a potentially frustrating situation less attention and importance rather than dwelling on it and magnifying it.
- **Be a decision maker.** Indecision is actually a decision to fail. Procrastination is simply a bad habit.[16]
- **Do not worry about your decisions.** Once you have decided to take action, proceed full steam ahead.
- **Do not try to do more than one thing at a time.** Prioritize what needs to be done and do one thing at a time. [16]
- **Focus on a goal**, then break it down into steps. Do each step in turn, leading towards the goal.[16]
- **Learn to relax.** It is not necessary to hurry and scurry through life. It's fashionable to be too busy, always tired, and overworked. Simplify your life. Insist on scheduled time alone for uninterrupted relaxation. This does not have to be an extensive period of time, but long enough for you to envision your goals and see the "big picture".[16]
- **Do not wrestle with a problem all day.** There are three "periods" in a day. One part of the day is for working, one is for sleeping, and the other is for you, your family, and your outside interests.[16] Do not allow yourself to shortchange personal time because of workload on an ongoing basis. Also, do not allow yourself to take the problem physically or mentally into the other periods of your life. You will be doing and yourself and the people in your life an injustice and you will lose valuable sleep. An additional and important benefit of leaving a problem for a while is that you can come back to it anew with a fresh perspective. People heal from injury faster when they get away and do other things. Obsessing about work is unhealthy. Get a life! Develop other interests to engage your mind. You will notice that you will be better able to deal with inevitable frustration.

Change your response to frustration

Of course we cannot always get our own way and no one will ever be able to completely avoid frustrations in life and you can't always head off. But by successfully coping with the causes of frustration, we can develop initiative, autonomy, and a sense of capability.

- **Re-learn your reaction to frustration.** If you learn nothing else from this article, *this is*

the single most important thing to remember! **We become upset by thinking in upsetting ways, not by encountering frustrating situations.** To remain un-angry and un-frustrated throughout life, you need to learn to question the idea that not getting your way is unbearable. When someone doesn't do what you wanted, or does something that you don't want them to do, they are exercising their own right. And when something doesn't work out as you planned (e.g. your computer keeps crashing), it is not the end of the world. Life will go on. It may be very inconvenient and disappointing, but you do not have to get angry. Getting angry makes it very difficult to generate a solution and it may even lead you to do something thoughtless or dangerous. Frustration and anger can definitely cause muscle tension, which sets the stage for a lifetime of cumulative trauma disorders. Next time you feel frustrated, stop to ask yourself if you really have to have your way.

This method of dealing with frustration is a relatively new theory of psychotherapy called rational-emotive therapy (RET). It deviates significantly from prior methods of dealing with frustration and anger. The premise of RET is that your life history is not what matters, and putting a lid on anger or finding appropriate ways to express anger is not the solution. Learning to react to frustration calmly, thoughtfully, and politely, without ever feeling anger, is most effective. You don't have to learn to cope with anger if you never feel it to begin with! There is so much more to this topic than can possibly be covered here, so we encourage you to read the book by Hauck if you want to learn more about how to retrain your reaction to frustration.[15]

- **Believe in yourself.** We have a tendency to maintain an image of ourselves that was planted there by other people when we were children. These images imposed on us should be assessed to determine if they are still true now that we are adults. We must realize that in many cases, these people were somewhat neurotic and that the labels they pinned on us were never true in the first place. They were misdirected attempts to make us behave in a certain way. You must try to rid yourself of long-held beliefs that are not useful and that hold you back from being the person you truly want to be.[15,16]

- **Change your environment.** If a frustrated person is removed from a frustrating environment, the level of frustration diminishes. The natural reaction to frustration is often to retreat into a shell. Stimulate yourself with a new environment by removing yourself from the frustrating situation. Often this will bring to life something new and challenging beyond the negativism of frustration. It isn't always possible to do this, but it is helpful to take 5 minutes to go outside and distract yourself with some pleasant reality. [16]

Another way to change the environment involves restructuring situations. If you know you get frustrated more easily when you are stressed and/or tired, give yourself a break at these times. Have standing rules with family or co-workers that you need certain times alone, such as the first 15 minutes after you arrive to and from work. Don't approach problems or serious discussions at times or in places that have a proven track record of leading to frustrating arguments or misunderstandings. Close the door to your child's messy room if it upsets you. Take an alternate route to work or start taking the train if your commute makes you crazy.

- **Don't make mountains out of molehills.** [15] Most events are not so serious as we think they are. Even if an event is very serious, we make matters worse by getting upset over it. Learn to distinguish between annoyances and catastrophes.

- **Do not wallow in self-pity.** [15] When you pity yourself, you depress yourself. You build up the injustice done to you so much that you talk yourself into thinking that the most awful things have happened to you and that someone ought to be badly punished. You become more and more bitter and resentful. The self-pitier is his own enemy, hurting yourself much more than you are hurting the person you believe is doing you wrong.

- **Don't bother venting to other people.** Research has shown that venting frustrations to people uninvolved in the situation does not relieve frustration. [8] Not only is it not effective, it actually helps you recall the situation, relive the frustration and may increase your frustration and multiply your grudges.

- **Do not place blame.** [15] Separate the person's actions from them as a person. Identify the problem and what is at fault to decide what needs to be corrected. By blaming a person, you are indicating that you feel they are inferior. Blame affects performance and makes people feel hostile, angry, and defensive. Blame distracts you from finding a solution to your frustration by focusing on personalities rather than answers.

- **Forgive, but don't forget.** [15] Forgive the people who have treated you badly, but do not forget. By forgiving them, you will calm down and stop holding a grudge, which will improve your well-being. By not forgetting, you will not repeat the scenario by avoiding it in the future. For example, if a person does not repay a loan, forgive them, but do not loan them money again.

- **Be assertive or aggressive without anger.** This generally requires that you first have sufficient self-respect. It is essential that you are firm and assertive with people who are doing you wrong. Even aggressiveness has validity if you have goals, but it doesn't mean hurting others or throwing your weight around. It is best to be assertive without anger, but if you cannot learn to do this, it is better to be angry than to let people walk all over you and not express your feelings. If you are dominated, it is because you have allowed it. Do not be passive when someone causes you to feel frustrated.

Dealing with Anger

Anger is the most common reaction to frustration. [7] By now you know that anger is not inevitable and after practice, you will probably be able to avoid anger much of the time. We already discussed the harmful effects of anger. But for those of us mortals who still get mad when we're frustrated, we need to learn to handle it better.

People use three main approaches to deal with angry feelings. [17]
Expressing anger in an assertive, but not aggressive manner is the healthiest way to deal with it. .

Suppressing anger means you hold it in, stop thinking about it, or focus on something positive in an attempt to convert anger into more constructive behavior. This can turn inward toward oneself

resulting in hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression. Unexpressed anger can also lead to passive-aggressive behavior or to a personality that seems perpetually cynical or hostile.

Suppression is a very dangerous reaction to frustration. You don't want to make waves, so you give in and let others have their way. This can go on for a very long time until after days, months, or even years of depression and brooding over the cumulative injustices, you give way to an explosion. Up until the explosion, the other person is probably not aware there is a problem. This is one of the most damaging ways of dealing with frustration from a psychological standpoint because of the extreme unhappiness it causes the person suppressing their feelings. The resulting explosion generally damages the personal relationship involved beyond repair, too (as opposed to a quick flare-up and resolution of anger).

Calming anger involves not only controlling your behavior, but also controlling your internal responses. It involves cooling yourself down when you are hot under the collar. This approach may involve relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, relaxing imagery, calming phrases and exercises.

Better communication is important when you are frustrated and angry. Rather than leaping to conclusions and acting on them, slow down and think through your communications. Counting to 10 is an old-fashioned method of giving yourself a chance to think and to prevent yourself from saying something you'll regret later. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying and what the real message may be. For example, what seems like criticism may actually signify feelings of neglect or hurt.[15, 17]

Humor can always be relied on to help ease tension.[17] Refuse to take yourself too seriously. Anger is often accompanied by ideas that, if examined, can make you laugh. If you become aware of the other person's neuroses that frustrate you, it's not usually that hard to create visions which will turn their frustrating behavior into humorous behavior. However, do not use humor to laugh off your problems and do not use humor in sarcasm. Sarcasm is just another form of anger-expression, not truly humor, and it is indirect.

Getting Help
If you feel that you need help dealing with your frustration and anger, especially if you are experiencing depression due to frustration, please seek help. We recommend that you seek help from a RET therapist, as discussed in this article.
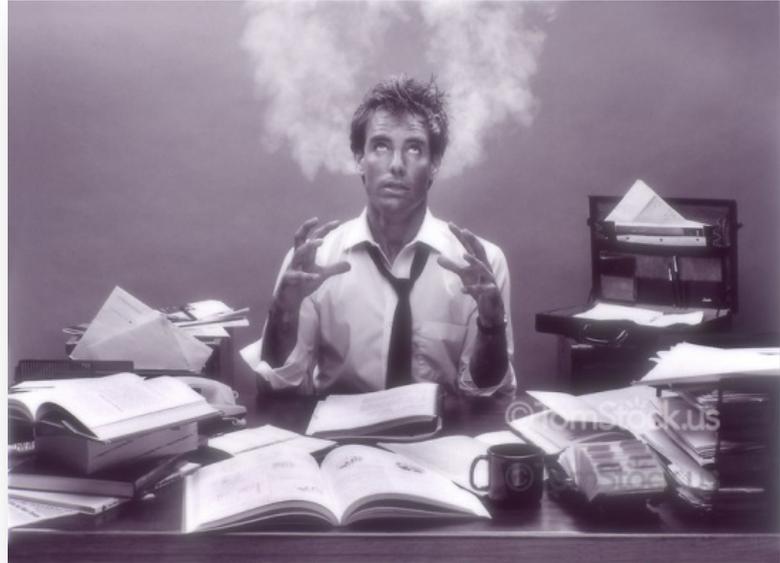
Coping with Frustrated Employees and Co-Workers
We all must work with other people. Therefore, we need to learn to deal with a variety of personalities and work styles. Managers have a dual challenge because they are responsible for accomplishing corporate goals as well as promoting employee well-being at work. Resolving conflicts and responding appropriately to people's frustration will greatly improve work relationships and accomplishments.

Preventing Frustration. Frustrated people often feel that they are in a helpless situation.[20] Typically, one or more people control their time and priorities. Often they are already overloaded or frustrated by other problems in their work (and personal) environment. Confronting new

assignments and challenges with the associated pressures, conflicts, and politics, <u>without resolving the existing issues,</u> is a common source of negative attitudes, burnout and injury.

Whether or not you are managing others, avoid creating a frustrating environment. For example, when scheduling, obtain everyone's honest inputs, take them seriously, and defend the resulting schedule from compression. Acknowledge conflicts of key resources with other projects. People often feel frustrated because they are not allowed adequate input, their superiors may be seen as powerless against schedule and budget demands, and/or the managers may not do what they can to defend their employees against overload. When people are overloaded, it is difficult to accomplish goals without frustration and overwork, which will eventually cause harm if the individual does not take action to prevent injury. Repetitive strain injuries are a reality and the tissue damage resulting from them is permanent. The dangers are twofold. First, the direct act of working long hours increases the risk of injury through fatigue and overuse of body parts. Second, the frustration, burnout, and loss of personal time increases stress and anxiety which indirectly increase risk of repetitive strain injury.

Daily communication is the only way to manage conflicts, frustrations, and problems so that anger does not develop into aggression. Communication is a shared responsibility of employees and management. It is important for individuals to communicate their concerns and frustrations to management, and for management to be sensitive to, and aware of, employees' stress levels. As we've discussed previously, frustration usually grows into anger, and eventually into an outburst of aggression. When dealing with frustrated or angry people, tackle the source of the problem, not the attitude itself.[20]

Guidelines for Communication. [21, 22, 23, 24]
1. If there is potential for violence, make sure you and fellow workers are protected and safe before approaching the frustrated or angry person.

2. Ask the person what they are frustrated about. *Listen for the unmet expectation, need or demand.*

- Be as empathetic as possible and relate to their anger.
- Do not interrupt, react, or indicate any type of judgement through speech, facial expression or body language.
- Genuinely strive to look at the situation through the other's eyes
- Don't defend yourself. If it involves your actions, apologize sincerely and wait for the other person to calm down.
- Listen, question, and paraphrase until the other person indicates that you've understood their viewpoint.

John Gray suggests that the words and interaction style you should use to empathize with men is very different from those you should use with women in the workplace.[25] Women tend to communicate on a personal level first and become impersonal when things become very heated, whereas men tend to communicate on an impersonal level first and become personal after they are angry. Therefore, to help a woman calm down you might say: "This must be so frustrating to you. You put so much effort into that and they never even read it!" These words would sound whiney to a man and would make him feel like his situation is pathetic and he is pitied. To a woman, it sounds like you understand her situation completely! So, to a man, you could say (in a tone of relief!) something like: "Boy, I'm sure glad I don't have your job." You still convey empathy, but you give the impression that he is capable of handling the situation.

In addition, Gray points out that men tend to state the frustration or problem and want to move directly into a solution. Discussing their emotions about the frustration is generally not only peculiar to them, but also unnecessary in solving the problem. Women may state their emotion about the problem first and expect questioning and discussion about the complexities of the problem before exploring the potential solutions. So, to alleviate a frustrating situation with a woman, make sure she has finished defining the problem before discussing a solution.

3. Disengage your own feelings, do not lose your temper, and take time to listen carefully. Do not interrupt the angry person or tell them to calm down. Never blame the person or use phrases like: "You should have…" or "You can't".

4. Use proper body language.
- Relax your body.
- Sit or stand side-by-side rather than across from the frustrated person, taking a similar stance (e.g., if they are sitting, you should sit; it they are standing, you should stand).
- Lean forward.
- Keep your voice low and your speech slow and evenly paced.
- Make eye contact.
- Nod, smile, and respond verbally to what they are saying so that they know you are listening.

5. With serious anger and/or repeated situations, refuse to deal with the angry person until the air has cleared. Back out gracefully by saying something like: "We need to discuss this. Let's talk about it later." Come back when you and the other person are more calm and in the mood for rational discussion about the problem.

6. Guide the discussion or dialogue.
- It is important to determine the scope of the problem. Isaacs discusses the importance of distinguishing between discussion and dialogue.[23] Discussion decomposes issues in order to make a decision. Dialogue is best used when considering new options, evaluating assumptions, and choosing alternatives. Dialogue is important when problems are large in scope, whereas discussion is generally adequate for resolving smaller individual problems.
- If the discussion is to be a formal meeting, you might even want to give the person a copy of one of the outline forms supplied in the excellent book, Working Relationships, by Bob Wall (see below).[26]
- Allow the person to complain if they need to, but don't let them drag you into it. Pay attention to the actual complaint; reiterate the concern, then verbally move the conversation along to get a resolution.
- Ask what the person wants of you using future-oriented questions such as "What would make this work for you?"
- Negotiate a win-win agreement. Explain your viewpoint tactfully and assertively and negotiate differences. If it appears that one person is winning and another is losing, this must be verbalized. Sometimes it's helpful or necessary to bring in an impartial third party to help solve the problem and offer potential solutions.

7. Develop a plan to handle problems in the future.

OUTLINE: Raising Issues Discussion Form[26]

Problem: Describe the issue in terms of goals, roles, and/or procedures.

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Impact: Describe ways in which the issue is affecting the job you do.

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Requests: What do you want from the other person?

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Benefits: How will solving this issue benefit everyone involved?

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