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Losing Your Temper

Temper, from the Latin *temperare* ‘mingle or restrain oneself,’ means a person’s state of mind in terms of them being angry or calm. You can *keep your temper* or *lose your temper*. You can have a *short temper* or a *fit of temper*. It’s up to you. Here’s what we mean.

The stimulus: Parker, a guy in your neighborhood, says something insulting about you. Your response: You react angrily, threatening to “punch him out.” Checkmate. You lose.

“He made me mad,” you tell your friend. Well, that’s not how it works. Parker didn’t *make* you mad. You *decided* to get mad. Think about it. In the time between Parker’s comment (the stimulus) and your threat (the response), you *chose* to get angry and threaten him.

How you act—and react—is always your choice. No one makes the decision for you. One option is to put your emotions on autopilot and react without thinking. That’s what happened when you had that knee-jerk response to Parker’s comment. Not good.

People operate one of two ways: emotionally or rationally. Emotional-based people make decisions based on their feelings. They blame their behavior on other people or circumstances and conditions outside their control. “I’m in a bad mood today because it’s raining,” they say.

Logic-based people make decisions based on facts. They take responsibility for their actions, making conscious decisions based on their values, rather than their feelings. The fact that it’s raining doesn’t affect their mood.

Taking responsibility for your moods—including anger—sometimes seems impossible. You want to yell at the person who left his gym locker open and on which you hit your head. But will that really help? No. Losing your temper rarely solves the problem.

The next time you feel yourself getting hot-under-the-collar, try these ways to keep your cool.

1. Pause - Resist knee-jerk reactions.
2. Think - Don't jump to conclusions.
3. Understand - Put the problem in perspective.
4. Respond - Focus on the problem, not the person.

Losing Your Temper Dos and Don'ts

- Take responsibility for your moods.
- Don't make a habit of losing your temper.
- Remember Aristotle's words, "Anyone can get angry; that's all too easy. But the challenge is to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way."

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