

# The Sand Paper

Winter 2011



## Take The Inner Journey

by Dr. Gretchen Stein, President & CEO of The Sand Creek Group.



The New Year lies before us like a blank canvas ready for us to create a new picture of our lives. Each year starts with new hope; the bright promise of doing things a new way for better results and life satisfaction. The winter season also calls us to slow down and spend more time indoors. The season itself prompts us to turn inward and examine our behaviors, motivations, dreams, relationships and other important aspects of life.

A New Year, beginning in the quiet of winter, sets the scene to look within ourselves - to take the journey of self discovery. "What am I doing that works well for me?" "What behaviors cause problems for me or for those close to me?" "Am I denying the need to change some important things in my life?" These are a few questions to start the inner dialogue. This edition of the Sand Paper offers thought provoking articles to further your journey.

The first article on anger, by Lisa Dau, reminds us to always acknowledge the feelings of others first, before offering solutions. This has applications for all areas of our lives. DJ Enga's article on personal and family finance encourages us to take stock of this area of our lives and to pull our ostrich heads out of the sand of denial and seek help when it is needed. If you are always in a hurry and feeling short of time, please slow down for a few

seconds and read Diane Johnson's article on "hurry sickness". It could change your life. Diane's second article on grounding will help to put you in touch with that which inspires you and gives your life meaning. Finally, I salute the initiative of the writer of a letter to Dear Sandy. He describes himself as an angry person wanting to stop being so rageful and seeking better ways to relate to people in his life. He has made the big step forward and will find help and support with us.

Possibly you have never talked to a counselor before but have thought of making some changes in your life for the better. A Sand Creek counselor can be a helpful, supportive guide to you as you begin the journey of life change. We help thousands of people a year to make positive, life affirming changes. Please give us a call, we can help. We offer you professional help, that is totally confidential and at no cost to you.

On behalf of the staff of the Sand Creek Group, we wish you a new year of positive change and personal growth for a more satisfying life.

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*"...a good general rule to follow is that when faced with an angry customer, first focus on acknowledging the feelings and what has upset the customer...You'll find that this will save you, and the customer, a lot of time and energy."*

## Angry Customers: A Tip for Navigating

by Lisa Dau, MA, LP, CEAP

When faced with an angry customer, it is easy and natural to assume that the customer wants his or her problem fixed. It's not that this isn't true; angry customers do expect you to help them in some concrete way; but this is only part of the solution, and it is the last part of the solution.

Think about a time where you were interacting with an angry customer and even though you presented a "fix" for the problem, the person was still angry. What is this telling us? It is telling us that a customer, who is angry, wants more than just the problem fixed. He or she wants to be heard, listened to and to have their reality recognized and acknowledged.

Let me share a personal experience that happened recently, where I was the angry customer. I received delivery of a kayak that I had waited over two months for and not only did it take a long time to arrive, it was also a very expensive kayak.

When I went to pick up the kayak, I noticed the box it was shipped in was damaged. Upon further investigation, the kayak was damaged with scratches and a forklift had put a crack in it. So much anger welled up in me I could physically feel it in my body. I immediately contacted the shipping company and began to vent. The person I was speaking to provided no acknowledgement of my situation and focused only on telling me where to go online and download the insurance papers so I could submit a damaged cargo claim and I could expect that it would take up to 4 months for resolution. As I hung up I was moving into rage.

As customer service providers, most of us want to try to solve the problem as quickly as possible, and there are many reasons for this. Interacting with angry customers is stressful and we want it to end quickly, maybe we fear conflict, we struggle acknowledging our own or other's feelings, or we don't know what to say in these situations. However, when we move too quickly to a fix that typically means we are not providing acknowledgment of what the customer is experiencing. The consequence is that oftentimes the customer is still angry or even angrier at not feeling heard, acknowledged or understood.

A few minutes after talking with the first shipping customer service person, a second representative called me. She immediately apologized for the situation, expressed how frustrating and disappointing this must have been for me and apologized again. She then

moved into explaining the claim process and apologized for how this process will take some time and how difficult this was for me having a new kayak, but receiving it damaged and not being able to use it.

Even though I was still angry, disappointed and frustrated, being heard and acknowledged immediately decreased the intensity of these feelings and I was able to hear, understand and better accept the reality of what she was telling me.

By listening to the customer, and conveying back that you hear and understand the issue and its impacts on the customer, this will decrease the intensity of the interaction. By not doing this, the customer will often remain angry and not in a place where he or she can listen or move toward solving the problem. This creates the scenario of you moving to solve the problem before the customer is "ready", or calm enough to work in that direction. This sometimes results in you having to repeat the same statements or ask the same questions over and over, or have the customer not listening or accepting what you say, or perhaps the customer continuing to vent even when the solution has been presented.

This dynamic of needing to be heard and validated is supported by research. Ronald J. Frederick, Ph.D. (2009) presents data that feelings need to be noticed, they need to be acknowledged, and they need to be identified. Once these feelings are recognized and labeled, they often stop vying for attention. The agitation that is generated decreases and we feel calmer. On a physiological level, simply naming feelings actually calms the feeling center of our brain, dampens the emotional response, decreases emotional distress and puts us back in control.

Taking all of this into account, a good general rule to follow is that when faced with an angry customer, first focus on acknowledging the feelings and what has upset the customer. Once the customer starts to calm down as a result of having his or her feelings recognized, it is then an opportunity move to solving the problem. You'll find that this will save you, and the customer, a lot of time and energy.

Reference: Frederick, R.J. (2009). *Living like you mean it: Use the wisdom and power of your emotions to get the life you really want.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

# Identifying Signs of Money Trouble

by D.J. Enga, AFCPE, Financial Counselor

Welcome to the New Year! Now is a great time to examine your money situation to ensure that you are aware of any potential problems and taking preventative steps to avoid hardship. If your financial situation is causing stress for you or your family, keep in mind that Sand Creek's EAP offers confidential, no-cost financial counseling for most financial situations. A financial counselor can help you better understand your overall situation, and develop a plan that provides realistic options to help you get back on track.

When it comes to your personal finances, there are always warning signs that indicate it might be time to consult with a counselor to get direction on how to avoid trouble or restore financial balance.

Here are some 'triggers' to watch out for:

## Relationship Issues

Money is one of the top 'triggers' that can cause stress in a relationship. If you find that there are disagreements that seem to continually occur surrounding anything financially related, it might be a good idea to meet with a counselor to help shape an objective viewpoint and work toward establishing common goals that are in the best interest of both individuals.

## The Spinning Credit Wheel

Many households find themselves able to pay all their monthly living expenses with a small surplus left over. Then life happens! Suddenly, you find yourself pulling out the credit card to cover expenses that always seem to pop up between paychecks. If you find that you're relying on an overdraft protection account, or borrowing the bank's money with interest, it might be a sign that you're over-extended.

## Feeling Down

Everyone wants to be able to pay their bills. If you find yourself unable to sleep at night because of your financial situation, it's imperative that you reach out to a counseling professional. Oftentimes the pressure of being "responsible" and maintaining "good credit", while also dealing with day-to-day life issues, takes a toll on our mental well-being. The cost on your physical health can be great. If you find that you're feeling angry, worried, or depressed when you think of your financial situation; it's a good idea to get some professional help.

## Loss of Income

Millions of households have been affected by the recession. Whether it is a lay off, reduced hours at work, health issues or divorce, working with less income can trigger a financial hardship. Coping with the trauma and emotional stress of having to support the same amount of expenses, on less income, can be very difficult. A counselor can help you identify options, form a 'crisis budget' and educate you on timelines and your rights as a consumer to help you better move through the situation to a resolution.



## A Dangerous Mix

Not budgeting (having a set spending plan), coupled with not keeping track of your spending is a dangerous mix indeed. When this occurs, an individual has no ability to manage their financial situation. If you don't have an understanding of where your money goes, you become less effective (and aware of options) when dealing with a financial hardship. A counselor can offer practical tips to help create habits that will make you wonder how you could have managed before without them!

## Denial

Asking for help can be very uncomfortable. There is a pervasive attitude that people should just know how to manage their money, their spending and their debts. But, the opposite is often true; you are not alone in that many individuals were never taught healthy money habits. Using a counselor to offer a financial 'check-up', to coach you through a situation or even educate you on various topics, can all be extremely effective.

## What Do I Do About Hurry Sickness?

by Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP



Hurry Sickness is defined as a malaise where a person feels chronically short of time, and so tends to perform every task faster and then becomes flustered when encountering any kind of delay. Though this malady is absolutely relevant today, the origin of the phrase came in the 1950's when two cardiologists, Dr. Meyer Friedman and Dr. Ray Rosenman, developed a theory about "Type A" behavior. This type of behavior was associated with individuals who felt oppressed by time. Examples included:

- speeding
- interrupting others
- becoming irritated when having to wait in line
- rushing from event to event
- chronically multi-tasking

These two physicians correlated this behavior with high blood pressure, heart conditions, anxiety and insomnia. These same consequences appear current today related to the pressured and harried behavior that many of us engage in. The reality of everyday life is such that for many of us we are doing more than ever at work with fewer resources and increasing expectations. While at home we may be a caregiver to a parent, child, partner, friend or all of the above. The external triggers of hurry sickness seem to be a "given" and probably are not diminishing.

The challenge becomes finding a way to shift our internal response so that we don't stay in a constant state of heightened vigilance and over-drive. In the 1980's Dr. Friedman developed a series of exercises to teach "Type A's" to engage in mellower more thoughtful behavior. He suggested things such as leaving your watch off for a day, picking the slowest line to stand in at the store, driving in the slow lane or reading classic literature. Other ideas that have been generated by a variety of sources include managing one's own expectations, accepting the inability to please everyone, not labeling every task as "urgent", practicing thinking of "hanging out" as a legitimate and productive activity, remembering to pause every hour to take 4 deep breaths.

As we move past one of the busiest times of the year and venture into 2011, it is an opportunity to take our own inventory related to "hurry sickness" and inoculate with new behaviors, attitudes and experimentation in our thinking.

## What Grounds You and Keeps You Going?

by Diane Johnson MSW, LISW, CEAP

As I am out meeting with hundreds of employees in a variety of work settings, one topic we talk about is the range of things that inspire us and keep us going as individuals. As the stressors accumulate, we can find ourselves sometimes bouncing like a ping pong ball from one situation to another. When we get in that reactive mode, it is easy to begin the spiral of depletion and feeling out of control in life.

One element of trying to stay proactive while also trying to replenish our energy is to know what grounds us. One element of grounding is being aware of how we talk to ourselves about a situation. Viktor Frankl, the Nazi concentration camp survivor and author, focused much of his writing on the choices we make and the beliefs and attitudes we carry with us in any circumstance. One of his well-known quotes is "Everything can be taken from a man or woman but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

One of the ways Frankl's quote translates into workplace conversation is the idea of clarifying our own attitude and beliefs about a challenging work environment, workload or colleague. Many times we are reacting to a situation or person

that we have no control over and as a result feel reactive and irritated. An element of grounding that helps us move back into a proactive mode is to create a personal mission statement. The suggestion is that each of us identifies two attitudes or behaviors that we want to see in ourselves every day, no matter what the circumstances may be. Examples of things that employees have identified include: finding one positive thing in every situation, finding a way to be kind no matter how I feel, accepting that life changes constantly and that's OK, learning something new every day.

The idea is that it can be helpful to take the time to identify what grounds us and what helps keep us going when circumstances are hard and/or are beyond our control. The next step becomes developing rituals or habits to remind us of these behaviors when the world around us is so fluid and we may be feeling the impact of so many pressures. This is when it is essential to know what keeps us going and what helps us feel like we are responding to life with the attitude that works for us.

## Dear Sandy,



I think I may have a problem with my anger, and I don't mean a little bit of a problem. It's gotten to the point that it kind of scares me. I get angry over ridiculous things, I say and do stuff I later regret, and then I do the same stuff all over again! I don't get a little angry anymore, I get so angry I want to break things or hurt people. Up to now I've been able to restrain myself from physically hurting anyone, but I still hurt them with my words...Last night, as I stood there raging at them, I saw the fear in my wife's and children's eyes...In the moment that was what I was after, but later, when I calmed down, I realized I didn't want to be doing that anymore. I don't want to hurt them...I don't want to hurt anyone, but sometimes I get so angry I think I'll just explode. I need to know what I can do to get a handle on this. Please help!

*One Angry Dude*

## Dear Dude,



Congratulations! You've already taken the first step, one of the most important steps in the process of getting better - You've admitted to having a problem and needing help to address it effectively. That's huge! Now you'll need to find out all you can about your anger and what keeps it going. You'll need to learn new skills to manage it better or not let it get going in the first place. You'll need to make a commitment to change. You can do it, but it will take some time. Your EAP is a good place to start. The EAP counselor can help you assess the problem and develop an appropriate treatment plan. They can also give you some tools you can use right away to avoid having things get out of control - saying or doing something you'll later regret.

Anger problems are frequently associated with a number of other life issues - medical, relational, environmental, and mental health. A comprehensive assessment from an anger management perspective is probably the best way to start. Give us a call...We'd be more than happy to help.

*Sandy*



*Send your inquiries for Sandy*

*to [info@sandcreekeap.com](mailto:info@sandcreekeap.com).*

*We may not be able to*

*publish all inquiries, but all*

*will be responded to via*

*email. Thank you.*

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## About Our Organization

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential assessment, short-term counseling, referral, and follow up. Professional counselors are experienced in helping people identify and find solutions to personal issues such as:

- Relationships
- Parent/Child Issues
- Substance Abuse
- Gambling
- Loss and Grief
- Financial Concerns
- Depression
- Job Stress
- Childcare or Eldercare
- And Other Life Concerns

Sand Creek EAP is your program. It's completely confidential, provided at no cost to you, and available to both you and your household family members. When you need help with personal concerns, we're the place to turn.

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