

# A little anger in negotiation pays

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Credit: Rice University

During negotiations, high-intensity anger elicits smaller concessions than moderate-intensity anger, according to a new study by management and business experts at Rice University and Northwestern University.

The researchers found that the effects of anger expressions in

negotiations depend on the [intensity](#) of the emotional display. Overall, the study found that [moderate-intensity](#) anger elicits larger concessions than no anger because moderate-intensity anger is perceived as tough. High-intensity anger is perceived as inappropriate and is less effective than anger of moderate intensity, the experts said. The study also found that expressions of anger lead to worse feelings about the [negotiation](#) relationship.

The paper, "Everything in Moderation: The Social Effects of Anger Depend on Its Perceived Intensity," will be published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. It was co-authored by Hajo Adam, an assistant professor of management at Rice's Jones Graduate School of Business, and Jeanne Brett, the DeWitt W. Buchanan Jr. Distinguished Professor of Dispute Resolution and Organizations at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management.

"Scholars have repeatedly asked if it is good or bad to express anger in negotiations," the authors wrote. "The current research indicates that negotiators should not just contemplate whether or not to express anger toward others, but also how to express anger toward others."

The researchers found consistent evidence to show that as anger intensity increased, initially the concessions that were made also increased; but at a certain point, as anger intensity continued to increase, the concessions decreased.

The authors demonstrated the impact of the intensity of the [anger expression](#) across two studies – the first with 226 undergraduate students from the United States (88 males, 138 females; average age 21), who participated in face-to-face negotiations involving a student project, and the second with 170 people (79 males, 90 females, 1 unspecified; average age 37) who participated in a computer-mediated/online negotiation on Amazon's Mechanical Turk website involving mobile

phone sales.

They used different ways to manipulate anger intensity by instructing negotiators to express anger, which generated natural variance in intensity levels, and by experimentally manipulating written anger statements that conveyed different intensity levels. For example, the authors created statements such as "This negotiation is starting to make me the slightest bit upset," "This negotiation makes me upset" and "This negotiation makes me TOTALLY UPSET!" to convey low, medium and high levels of intensity, respectively.

The authors said more research is needed to understand how the nature of emotional expressions influences individual and interpersonal outcomes. "It would be interesting to explore the influence of intensity with respect to emotions that are common in negotiations besides [anger](#), such as happiness, disappointment or pride, to develop a more thorough understanding of how intensity levels influence the social effects of emotions," the authors wrote.

**More information:** Hajo Adam et al. Everything in moderation: The social effects of anger depend on its perceived intensity, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2017.11.014](#)

Provided by Rice University

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