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The riff: Henry Fonda and 'good' anger



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New studies reinforce idea that rage can be a moral weapon



Workplace anger can slip so easily into bullying and even violence that it seems safer to ban it. But the red mist can be useful. If you outlaw rage, you may reduce the chance that injustices will be flagged and increase the risk of ethical breaches.

This is delicate territory. The late Steve Jobs had a short temper, but non-geniuses mimic his management style at their peril. How a flash of anger is received may also depend whether you are a man or a woman: when I first wrote about the usefulness of angry office outbursts, a female colleague tweeted that this was indeed good advice — “for dudes”.

“Moral anger” aims to correct a violation of a moral standard in the interests mainly of others and even at personal risk, according to University of

Liverpool's Dirk Lindebaum. In two papers, he and co-authors point to examples such as surveillance whistleblower Edward Snowden, or Henry Fonda's character in *12 Angry Men* .

In the 1957 film of the jury-room drama, Fonda turns an 11-to-one majority for a guilty verdict into a vote for acquittal. He fights other jurors' unproductive rage with his own targeted bursts of moral anger to "restore moral order".

Given the toxic impact of lost tempers, it must be right to set the bar for office anger high.

There is little room for your undignified rant over a colleague's unearned promotion, or your boss's red-faced tirade about the temperature of his morning coffee, let alone for daily victimisation of staff by choleric co-workers.

But as an occasional weapon for good, rage is worth keeping in the armoury. Anyone who disagrees can step outside.

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