

Temper! Temper!

Recently, I had a phone call from a concerned father of a 15 year old. He told me that his son could not seem to control his temper after a poor performance. He asked me if Mental Management might be helpful in eliminating this behavior. As I have been working on this problem for the past few weeks I thought that you might benefit from what we have learned. Not that you need it personally mind you but you might have a friend that loses it occasionally and you might need the information to do something helpful for them before you do something harmful to them.

If you look in the dictionary you will find several definitions for this word, temper. One meaning of the word is a tendency to become easily angry or irritable causing an outburst of rage as in losing one's temper. Let's look at this phenomenon from three angles. First, why does it happen? Next, is it really destructive to our mental game? And finally, what can be done about it?

People who tend to lose their tempers seem to do so when things that they were certain were buckled-up come unbuckled. Almost all of us have experienced this at one time or another. We see it often in children and we hope that as adults we should have outgrown the tendency to get angry when things do not go our way. With the loss of temper we experience an accompanying loss of control. We become the opposite of the person we most want to become. We sometimes take out our anger on slam-able doors and nearby throw-able objects. We tend to shift the blame for our troubles to anyone other than ourselves and heaven help the first person that tries to talk us out of this behavior.

So why do we tend to lose it? Well, according to Dr Kalman Heller, a PHD psychologist who studies and writes about this sort of thing, losing one's temper is caused by stress, unrealistic expectations and a feeling of powerlessness.

How do you respond to the stress of competition? Are you empowered by it? Do you feel that stress is a positive thing? Is it an advantage? No? If you feel that stress is not your friend you are not alone. However, most elite performers that I have worked with feel that stress works for them and not against them in competition. Competitive stress will not cause your performance to drop, however, your attitude about it may. Those that use stress to their advantage have several things in common. They believe that the stress of competition will help them achieve their goals, they are disciplined in their preparation for trials and they tend to be veterans of many competitions. How do you stack up in these areas?

Most people know that if you visualize something in advance it improves the chance that it will happen so rehearsing success is a good thing to do. How about also rehearsing that you are in complete control when things go out of control? We learn more when we make mistakes than when we are error free. I am suggesting that the best expectations for you in a competition are first to advance your personal growth as a competitor and secondly to reach your goals as a team. When the only acceptable expectation of a competitor is to win there is a huge chance that they will be devastated if the result is anything less than what was envisioned. So, what should you do? I recommend rehearsing that you are calm, collected and cool when inundated by events that cause others to lose it. It will become "like you" to handle the unexpected with grace, skill and good humor. Wow! Under control, whether or not you are the winner, is the ultimate goal.

There is great danger in losing your temper and here's why. Your Self-Image makes you act like you. If you feel in control and powerful you will tend to act accordingly. Conversely, when you allow yourself to become angry and lose control this may soon become a habit. Your Self-Image is changed by imprinting; both what your environment give you and by what you imagine. The power of the imprint is heightened when there is a lot of emotion in the imprint. Losing your temper causes severe damage to your Self-Image. You are improving the probability of having this situation repeat itself in the future. You must control what you think about immediately after an action. Your future depends on it. Be careful what you reinforce. Take a break and understand that this will get better with time. Your patience is being tested. You are anything but powerless. You have the power of your knowledge, your endless hours of training and if you will focus on solutions instead of problems you have power over this very moment. Now is the time to feel power-FULL. Now is the time to use your temper not to lose it.

So what is your temper? If you revisit the dictionary you will find another definition for the word temper. To strengthen through experience or hardship; to toughen as in soldiers who had been tempered by combat. Problems, when we choose to find solutions for them, tend to strengthen us. If you are not having a lot of problems your goals are too small. Your task is not so much to avoid your problems as to learn from them. Some of the solutions to life's greatest lessons come to us during conflict. When you feel the tendency to loose you temper stop to think, "This is the time when I'm being tested. I can and will get through this. What is the lesson here? What can I take away from this situation that is positive?"

Now is the time to keep your cool and ask the question, "Temper, temper, am I losing it or using it?"

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