



**MICHAEL R. DILIBERTO, ESQ.**



## **Anger! (What Is It Good For?)**

If you find yourself getting angry at your counterpart during a negotiation, would it help your outcome to show that anger or should you hide it? A new study by researchers Allan Filipowicz of INSEAD in Singapore and Sigal Barsade and Shimul Melwani of the University of Pennsylvania examined how a counterpart's emotional transition, either from happy to angry or angry to happy, influenced negotiators' behavior and impressions of the relationship.

In the experiments, participants believed they were negotiating with other participants, when they were really negotiating with a computer program, or with an actor trained to behave in a certain way. The participants made significantly greater concessions to partners who displayed a "becoming angry" (happy to angry) emotional transition, than to negotiators who seemed angry throughout the negotiation, or to negotiators who transitioned from anger to happiness. It appears that when a negotiator seemed angry throughout talks, participants assumed that the negotiator was angry by nature. But when a negotiator transitioned from happiness to anger, participants held themselves responsible for the negotiator's increasing negativity and felt motivated to make concessions to restore harmony.

Interestingly, the participants formed better impressions of their relationship with the other party when that party's emotions seemed to shift, whether from anger to happiness or the reverse, than when the other side's emotions seemed stable. The participants were also influenced by "emotional contagion," or the tendency to "catch" the others' emotions. Participants who "caught" pleasantness from a happy-seeming counterpart became more cooperative and willing to make concessions. However, participants facing a counterpart who was angry from the start caught some of this anger and behaved more competitively as a result, even if the counterpart became more cheerful.

I am not suggesting that people should feign anger to get their way. However, the study shows that it could be a mistake to conceal genuine anger that emerges during a negotiation. Negotiators who transition from happiness to anger in the later stages of a negotiation may create greater concessions from the other side and plant seeds for a productive relationship.