



WALKING THROUGH ANGER

**a new design
for confronting
conflict in an
emotionally
charged
world**

CHRISTIAN CONTE ▾ PHD

CREATOR OF YIELD THEORY

BOOK EXCERPT

Contents

	Foreword by John Wetzel	ix
	Foreword by Ron Potter-Efron	xi
	Introduction	1
1	Yield Theory Compassion as the Cornerstone of Communication	9
2	How Yield Theory Works Listen, Validate, Explore Options	19
3	Acceptance Meeting Others Where They Are	37
4	Authenticity Operating from Essence	49
5	Compassion Overcoming Anger	67
6	Nonattachment Letting Go of Ego	83
7	Conscious Education Plato's Cave and the Expansion of Understanding	105
8	Creativity Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Problem Solving	127
9	Mindfulness Being in the Conflict	147
10	The Five Errors of Communication What Not to Do!	171
	Epilogue	189
	Acknowledgments	191
APPENDIX A	Essentials of Yield Theory	193
APPENDIX B	Teaching Tales	197
	About the Author	211

If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.

LAO TZU



Introduction

Imagine you were trapped in a room and didn't see a way out. If people on the outside talked at you about how they got out of a room before, you'd likely feel pretty defensive. You might even be especially upset if they didn't realize that you were trapped in a completely different kind of room with an altogether different escape route than the one they were once trapped in.

"I'm in a different room!" you shout.

"Yes," someone replies, "but this is what I did to get out . . ."

"Please help me! I'm not in the room you were trapped in!" you respond.

"Well, I felt like that once too," another person on the outside says. "Let me tell you about how I felt . . ."

"I don't want to hear how you felt!" you say in desperation. "You telling me how you felt does nothing to help me get out of this room!"

"What's wrong with you?" a third person says. "Why are you so angry and resistant? We're all only trying to help!"

Because they can fully comprehend only their own experiences and the solutions that worked for them, the people on the outside genuinely don't understand why their words aren't helpful. And because the

people on the outside don't take the time to listen to you describe what the room you're in looks like from your perspective, nor do they own the role they play in their interaction with you, they put the blame entirely on you.

And after all their words, there you are, still trapped in that room. Yes, there is a way out, but the people preaching at you about their experiences won't help you find it. You need solutions that will work for you, and you need those solutions to be relevant to the room you're actually in, not entirely different rooms that others were stuck in previously.

If you can feel the frustration of being in that scenario, if you can see clearly how ineffective it is for people to assume that you being trapped in a room is exactly the same as the experience they had, then you understand the key to circumventing defensiveness in communication. If you truly understand this scenario, in fact, I would argue that you understand why Yield Theory® is revolutionary and transformative. The room in the scenario is ever changing, as is the way out. Only one person can ever be in the room at a time, so no one else in all of time will ever see the room the exact way that you see it. And neither will you ever see the exact room others are in. All we can ever do is hear about each others' rooms.

The rooms are our psyches.

If you want to help people who are trapped in their rooms, there are three things that you can do. You can listen with humility as others teach you about their rooms. You can validate the experience and emotions they're describing. And then you can explore realistic options of what they can do to help themselves from this moment forward.

To do those three things well, it's crucial first and foremost to recognize where people actually are and then to be authentic in your desire to learn what they're willing to teach you about their experience. When you have the humility to lead with compassion instead of ego, you improve your chances of tapping into the creative processes that will help you shine a light of conscious education for others in a way that specifically addresses their individual needs.

Through it all, be mindful about the role you play in every interaction, including what is and isn't in your control. The less attached you are to needing others to see what you see or having things go a certain way, the more you will genuinely help others help themselves to be free.

This is Yield Theory. ◀

Everyone has a story. Everyone. No matter the pain others cause, no matter the impulsivity they display, the mistakes they make, or anything else, there are no monsters among us; there are only human beings who have personal histories. That doesn't mean, of course, that people don't do terrible things, and it certainly doesn't excuse any harm that's done. Explaining behavior never excuses it, but it does help us understand it. Ultimately, just as in your own life, each moment has led to the next in the story of everyone's life. The more you understand those stories, the more effective you'll be at walking through conflict.

I specialize in anger management, and my path has often placed me right in the middle of some extraordinarily intense situations. Through the years, I have witnessed extremely effective and also terrifyingly ineffective approaches to handling anger. I've watched firsthand just how much anger can beget anger and how ego can escalate it; and I've also seen

just how powerfully transformative and de-escalating a process I call "leading with compassion" can be. I learned that trying to see the world through other people's eyes requires only a shift in perspective, and it actually doesn't take any more time than not trying to do so. Having a nonjudgmental attitude doesn't mean not acting to de-escalate conflict and speak up, either. To the contrary: I will show you how leading with compassion and seeking to understand will help you navigate clearly and directly through even the most difficult and emotionally charged situations.

As I reflect on my own story, I can recall two distinct moments from my childhood that ultimately led me to becoming an expert in anger. I invite you to take a guess what those two events might be. My guess is that neither of these experiences is likely to be anything close to what you might imagine. And that's the point. The more you hear of individuals' stories, the less you assume, and the more you understand. More understanding leads to more effective communication, including in the handling of difficult interactions. Back to my story: Here are those two specific moments that I believe led me to choose the path I took all the way to the publishing of this book. See if your guesses were right.

My dad was a professor of English literature before he changed directions and switched to teaching earth science. When I was young, I saw the fun in storytelling, in mythology, and in the subject of literature; but, admittedly, I did not see the value in studying the ground. As a haughty teenager, I asked my dad why he chose to be an earth scientist. He replied, "If you're only ever going to live on one planet in your life, don't you think you ought to know about that planet?" I loved that answer. A few years later, when I entered college, I felt lost and didn't know what course of study to follow. I thought about my dad's explanation of why he did what he did. Then the thought occurred to me: I will only ever live with me, so shouldn't I get to know myself? I decided then and there to study psychology.

My mom was a high school English teacher. She was well respected among the students, because she was a strict disciplinarian. She was the kind of teacher kids tend to complain about as too demanding, only

to realize as young adults that they benefited from meeting her requirements. The kids at the high school I attended had fistfights fairly frequently; like in any 1980s teen movie, the students really would circle up around the two kids who were about to duke it out. Before I entered ninth grade, my mom looked at me and said, “I had better never find out that you ever watched a fight. If you see people fighting, step in and break it up.” I did as she taught me. From the time I was young, when I saw conflict, I stepped toward it, not away from it.

I didn’t run from conflict then, and I don’t run from it now: not others’ and not my own. Learning about human behavior—about myself—and being willing to step toward conflict taught me simple but profound life lessons. Anger is natural, it’s usually driven by ego, and we’re not “wrong” or “bad” for feeling it; but we can certainly face regrettable consequences when we react to it impulsively. Perhaps the most awakening truth about the emotion of anger I’ve discovered is this: Regardless of how overwhelming anger ever feels or how scary conflict ever gets, it will eventually pass. In facing the conflict in my own life, I learned a great deal about myself, and the more I learned about me, the more effective I became at handling the anger I experienced. Eventually, I became effective at handling other people’s anger, as well.

Now think about the guesses you made regarding the two experiences that shaped the direction I took. Were your guesses accurate? How on point were your assumptions? More importantly, after reading about my experiences, has your mind raced to convince you that what you thought was “pretty much” what I said? In other words, did you try to fit the answers I gave into what you thought they would be?

The way you respond to information that you didn’t see coming says a lot about where you are in the process of personal growth. The more open you are to taking in new information, the closer you are to handling anger and conflict well. Conversely, the more your ego works to make the world fit into what you already know, the more prone you are to defensiveness and anger.

Being willing to face conflict effectively takes knowledge, self-awareness, and practice. The more

you know about yourself and about how to handle highly charged situations, the more confident you’ll be in handling them without allowing your own energy to be changed by them. This book will give you the keys to self-awareness, the knowledge for handling conflict, and the specific methodology to practice to get you to where you want to be.

Intelligence is knowing information, but wisdom is practicing it. It’s great to understand intellectually that attachment to ego is at the heart of many episodes of anger and conflict. But being aware of what triggers your ego and understanding how to set your ego aside take effort. If you are attached to needing others to think, believe, or behave in the ways you expect (or demand), you will struggle to resolve conflict. In fact, the extent to which you are attached to needing things to be the way you demand them to be is directly correlated with how much anger you will experience.

As you will discover in this book, the Buddha’s teachings have had a deep impact in my life and are interwoven throughout my approach. For example, in the Buddha’s famous Fire Sermon, he talked about all things being on fire. The sermon can seem strange—here is a peaceful figure describing such burning and chaos—until you understand that the fire he described is change. Seeing the “fire of anger” in the context of change taught me to walk directly through it without being afraid and without being burned, because the profound truth I learned was that all anger, all conflict, and in fact all emotional experiences have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They will inevitably change. Once I understood on the deepest level the true temporary nature of anger, I was significantly empowered to avoid making impulsive decisions in the beginning or middle of tough emotional experiences that I knew would ultimately come to an end.

You, like me, will experience anger in your life. You will also encounter others who are angry. You are the only person in your life you will always live with, and you are the only person you can ever control in any interaction you ever have. The more you understand what leads to what in the story of anger and the concept of nonattachment, as well as

the temporary nature of emotions, the better you will understand yourself, and the more open you will be to learning exactly what you need to do to walk directly through anger. In this book, I lay out the methodology for how you can do that.

The Origin and Substance of Yield Theory

I created Yield Theory as my approach to psychotherapy twenty years ago. I've used it as a guiding force from which I have interacted with widely diverse clients: individuals struggling with the normal emotions of life, people dealing with very serious mental health issues, families suffering from interpersonal chaos, couples learning how to communicate, adolescents toiling with their ever-present angst, elite athletes competing on the world stage, celebrities coping with too much attention, men and women struggling with issues of intense anger, everyday people suffering in the throes of addiction, and some of the most violent criminals on the planet facing the consequences of their actions. My therapy work has taken me from the comfortable Zen setting of my private practice to national television shows to the deepest regions of solitary confinement in maximum-security prisons. I have seen thousands of clients, practiced more than 20,000 hours of clinical therapy, run a mental health organization, cofounded a center for people convicted of violent crimes, and taught as a tenured professor at a major university. In everything I've done, Yield Theory has guided me, helping me to counsel, teach, communicate, and cope with experiences I've had.

Yield Theory is a powerful philosophy and an evidenced-based approach to change. It is also a way of life. It is not a panacea by any means, but it is a revolutionary model from which you can learn how to interact with others on a deep level and induce change in a quick, effective way. It can help you connect with people who are resistant to change, and it can guide you through successful ways to handle any conflict. Yield Theory has been demonstrated to work as a de-escalation tool to help even highly resistant inmates classified as the most violent in maximum-security institutions make a statistically significant reduction in their violent outbursts, so

imagine how effectively it can help you connect with others and deal with conflict in your own world.

Although it's true that you cannot change others, only yourself, it's also true that you can have an impact. The key to affecting others in a way that ignites a change in them begins with you meeting people where they are, not where you think they "should" be. Unfortunately, the following Zen parable paints a fairly accurate picture of the way most people tend to hope to spark change in others.

► A fool once stood at the top of a mountain. Looking down, he saw that all the other people were at the bottom. He wanted the others to be standing next to him, and he began to get angry. He yelled and screamed at the people to stop going the wrong way, and he shouted over and over that they should be next to him on the mountaintop. But no matter how angry he got, the fact remained that the others were at the bottom of the mountain. They were too far away to hear even a syllable of anything he said. ◀

Often we read stories such as these and believe that the foolish protagonist is someone "out there." We don't realize that at times we also embody the very same characteristics. Everyone who has ever espoused an angry opinion on social media or in an Internet comment section has been, in that moment, the fool on the mountaintop. More close to home, consider how many times you've wanted others to change so badly that you found yourself preaching at them rather than talking with them. "Yes, but it comes from a place of love," you say, and of course it might; but that doesn't change the fact that if you speak at others instead of with them, you will likely not be heard. If you want others at the bottom of the proverbial mountain to hear you, then it's on you to have the self-discipline to leave the place where you are, climb down the mountain, and meet them where they are. "Yes, but I shouldn't have to do that all the time," you say, and that's a perfectly normal thought to have; but in the moments when you think that, you are most precisely like the man at the top of the mountain yelling down to others.

Going down to the bottom of the mountain creates the opportunity for you to address conflict directly and at its source, instead of staying far away from it, doing nothing effective about it, and hoping it magically changes.

In the following pages, you will learn about yourself, anger, and how you can handle conflict in the most effective way possible. You will learn how to

lead with compassion and humility in order to bypass people's defensiveness and how to communicate in ways that get through to them, regardless of their emotional state. The methodology isn't complex, but it does require effort to practice. The more you practice it, the better you'll get at it, until eventually it will become a natural way of interacting for you.



CHRISTIAN CONTE, PHD,

is a licensed professional counselor, a certified Domestic Violence Counselor, and a Level V (highest level) Anger Management Specialist from the National Anger Management Association. His Yield Theory training has generated successful results for violent criminals, family therapy, and professional athletes. Visit drchristianconte.com for more.

**NOW AVAILABLE AT YOUR
FAVORITE BOOKSELLER**

