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scruples

To yell or not to yell:
That is the question
By Ellen Welty

Express yourself: rules for the angry

Dear Ms. Scruples,
Until recently, I was a saint. Not an official one listed with churches, of course, but a saint. Incredibly sweet and kind, helped tons of old ladies cross streets. Then, last month, *boom*, suddenly I was sick to death of being a saint. I realized how mad a lot of people made me—and I let them know it: yelled at my shrink for yawning while I was talking. Yelled at my friend Tina for telling someone my salary. Yelled at old ladies for getting in my way. Now I can't stop yelling. It feels great, it feels right...oh, God, I'm a beast. Help.

—Beast

Dear Beast,
Don't despair, Ms. Scruples is here. And the first thing she wants you to do is to repeat after her: *There is nothing wrong with getting angry at people*. So with no further ado, I present **Ms. Scruples' Guidelines for Getting Pissed:**
1. No waiting. Many people, when angry, make the mistake of thinking, "I shouldn't say anything right now. I should go away and calm down first." Wrong. Get it out and get it over with. Otherwise, you'll await the right time for the rest of your life, getting angrier and angrier as the years go by, gradually becoming consumed with stupid revenge fantasies that you replay every morning in the shower.

Not only that, you will have added to your already dangerously large supply of stored-up anger. All of us have a huge cauldron of the stuff boiling within us, the first cupful of which is dumped into the cauldron at around age six months, when our mothers first tire of us, often leaving us in cold baths for half an hour while they talked on the phone with a friend. But enough mother-bashing. The problem is when you keep adding more and more unexpressed anger to the cauldron—well, you can easily end up miserable for the rest of your life. So, anyhow,

I'm sure you can see that the best plan is to express your anger the minute you feel it, instead of adding to the cauldron.

2. No raging without reminding yourself whom you're raging at. Before you rail at someone, describe the person to yourself: Trust me, this will help you approach the situation more intelligently. For instance, I got ticked off at my masseur, Otto. Plainly put, he was pummeling me too hard; he was distracted, listening to some mud-wrestling match on the radio. Before lighting into him, I defined him to myself: "Otto is my masseur. The man is as stupid as a brick. But his heart is in the right place. He deserves to be spoken kindly to." So I very sweetly called: "Otto, Otto, oh, Otto..." As it turned out, he did not hear me and I did have to knock his radio onto the floor to get his attention—but I was sweet again after that.

3. No hurling vague accusations. Let us take your contretemps with your friend Tina as our example here. You probably screamed: "Tina, how could you do this to me? I thought I could trust you. I am very upset. I feel betrayed," bleh bleh bleh. Pointless. It would have been far more productive for you to have defined specifically (and as calmly as you could) what you were angry about: "I'm upset that you told people about my salary." That's it. Then a conversation, which is far more useful than a monologue, would have started up. Tina would have said she was sorry, and promised not to do it again. You would have taken care to express all your anger: "I'm worried that now Clarice is going to ask me to pay for her drinks all the time." And Tina, wanting to make amends—because you've been fair and open-minded, even while angry—would have said, "Don't worry, I'll tell Clarice I lied. She's a jerk, she'll believe anything." Simple, yes?

4. Oh, yes, one more thing—no screaming at old ladies. □