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Understand the Difference Between Regular You and Angry You

By **Jesse Singal**



In a [few different articles](#), Melissa Dahl has drawn a really important, useful line between “present you” and “future you.” Often, present you can make decisions — procrastinating, eating the wrong stuff — that end up harming future you, because future you feels like a distant, distinct person. It’s easy to forget about future you in the heat of the moment, in other words.

This concept kept popping into my head as I read a [Harvard Business Review article](#) by Liane Davey, an author and leadership guru, about how to prevent conflicts from spiraling out of control.

Now, technically Davey’s article is about conflicts in corporate settings, but her insights extend well beyond the boardroom. Her basic point is that as a given argument escalates, so too do the odds that the participants will say unproductive, hurtful things that don’t really have to do with the substance of the argument itself. “Do any of the following sound familiar?” she asks. “After someone speaks, you make no reference to what she said, instead jumping straight to your counterargument (or going off on a complete tangent). Your points become more polarized as the conversation goes back and forth. Maybe you question your coworker’s motives or his relevance, competence, preparation. Or you use a passive-aggressive approach, turning your body away from the person and toward all the other people in the room.”

The problem, Davey writes, is that “Each of those behaviors sends the signal that you don’t value what your coworker has to say. You are invalidating him.” And the key way to reverse things is to communicate to them that you’re treating them like a flesh-and-blood human being with concerns and opinions that deserve respect. Davey gives a couple of examples of the sorts of validating statements that can help slow things down: “I think this is a really important issue that we need to talk through openly,” for example, or, “You come at this from a very different perspective than I do, so it’s natural that we see it differently.”

Written out this way, none of this sounds complicated. Of *course* you should treat someone you’re arguing with like a human being. But this is where I’d borrow Melissa’s formula: When you’re arguing with

someone, whether it's a co-worker, a friend, or a romantic partner, your heartbeat is up, you may be sweating, and you are, physiologically, a somewhat different person than you normally are. That's "argument you," a distinct human being — at least in the ways that matter — from "regular you." Regular you understands that people can disagree, even vehemently, without it meaning that one person is bad and the other is good. Regular you doesn't value petty insults or point-scoring over trying to work things out for the long-term good of a relationship. Regular you exercises common sense in interpersonal relationships. But when that flip gets switched and angry you comes out, all this prudence flies out the window — and what angry you does can come back to bite regular you, who has to own up to what angry you said last night, in the butt.

Story continued below

Of course, some people have much bigger, more aggressive angry versions than others (insert your own Donald Trump joke here). But we all have angry versions of ourselves, and they all share a certain insecurity and myopia. So while there's a cynical part of me that wants to roll my eyes at the idea of keeping certain calming, validating sentences in my back pocket to utter when an argument with someone seems to be ramping up, on the other hand: Angry me can be kind of a jerk.

Sources: HBR

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