THE GAME YOU CAN'T WIN

PURPOSE

Look at the last time you got mad. Find what you wanted that you don't control. Then put your effort on the part you do control.

INSTRUCTIONS

Fill in page 1 now. Use page 2 every evening for 7 days. 10 minutes now, 2 minutes a night.

STEP 1

The last time I was mad, it was because...

Example: In the meeting, my manager gave my idea to someone else.

STEP 2

What did I want?

Tick the one that was really driving it.

- ☐ To win (be right)
- ☐ To look good
- ☐ To be treated as important

STEP 3

Split it in two

What I wanted that I don't control, and the part I do control.

WHAT I DON'T CONTROL	WHAT I DO CONTROL
Whether they admit it was my idea	How good the work is. What I say next.

STEP 4

Which problem was it?

Circle one. Often it is more than one.

EGO

Needing to be right.

FREEDOM

Letting my reaction choose for me.

RESPECT

Demanding to be treated as important.

STEP 5

What did The Show cost me?

Example: We argued for an hour. The real problem didn't get solved.

STEP 6

My commitment

Next time I feel the need to win, to look good or to be treated as important, what will I do instead?

Example: Ask one question about their idea before I defend mine.

I will _____

STEP 7

Every evening for 7 days

Answer the three questions you control. Tick yes or no.

DAY	DID I ACT WELL?	DID I DO WHAT I SAID I WOULD?	DID I CHOOSE HOW I REACTED?
Day 1	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 2	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 3	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 4	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 5	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 6	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 7	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO

STEP 8

After 7 days: what changed?

In how I felt, and in how people acted around me.

Why this works. Most anger comes from wanting something you don't control. Splitting what you control from what you don't is an old idea from the teacher Epictetus, and the psychologist Albert Ellis named him as a root of his therapy. In studies of groups, people who got their way through fear and people who got it through skill both gained influence, but only the skilled ones were liked. A plan for the moment the urge comes makes you far more likely to follow through, and checking yourself each day helps you keep going.

WHAT WE CONTROL (EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION 1) · RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY (ELLIS, 1962) · DOMINANCE AND PRESTIGE (CHENG, TRACY ET AL., 2013) · IF-THEN PLANS (GOLLWITZER & SHEERAN, 2006, META-ANALYSIS) · TRACKING PROGRESS (HARKIN ET AL., 2016, META-ANALYSIS)