

As you requested, this is your ACT Self-Advocacy Resource Network memo facilitating a national dialogue among self-advocates and supporters and a clearinghouse for materials and training that support self-advocacy.

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Volume 1, Number 11:

TOPIC: How Do You Feel About That?

Do you ever get so mad about something you don't know what to do? Most of us have had that experience, especially concerning self-advocacy. Feelings are a natural part of life. It's good to pay attention, to know how we feel about things in our lives. If we use that knowledge in the right way, those feelings can motivate us to do something, to make something good happen. That's the advice from Ed Roberts, founder of the independent living movement:

"I want to talk about anger. We don't need to... "get over" our anger, we need to channel it into making change for the greater good."

Powerful feelings leading to powerful action—that's self-advocacy!

1. The Importance of Feelings to Self-Advocacy

Everyone has feelings. They are a natural part of life. Denying them, avoiding them or pushing them under the rug only leads to problems for us. It's important to notice them and talk about them. People in the self-advocacy movement perhaps share some common feelings—feelings of frustration and anger at barriers in society and feelings of pride and joy at working together for change. Here's another quote from Ed Roberts:

"I get angry all of the time. I'm angry that people with disabilities are still second-class citizens in this country. I get angry at how 97% of the billions of federal dollars spent either perpetuate our dependency on the system or increase it."

Paying attention to these feelings can make us more effective in our work for self-advocacy. How? Well for one thing, our feelings often reveal our values. As we talk about them with each other, we can connect our common values, the values that keep us going. A second way feelings advance self-advocacy is that they can spur us to take positive action. Read on.

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2. Ed Roberts on How Anger Can Lead to Positive Change

"I want to talk about anger. Most psychiatrists and service professionals who work with us tell us that anger is a bad thing... a stage to get over or something that we need to overcome. But anger is a powerful energy. We don't need to suppress or "get over" our anger, we need to channel it into making change for the greater good. We need to... focus it on removing obstacles and making things happen."

Excerpted from *Highlights from Speeches by Ed Roberts* (Jon Oda, 1995)

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3. Three Sayings About Anger: One Helpful, Two Not

a. **Don't get mad, get even.** Not helpful. Revenge is a negative energy. It will **not** help self-advocacy.

b.
Get mad, then get over it (Colin Powell). Not helpful. It's appropriate to be mad about lots of things. But just "getting over it" is missing an opportunity to create positive change.

c.
Get mad, then organize (paraphrase of Ed Roberts). Perfect for self-advocacy. Use anger as energy to make positive change.

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4. A Good Use of Feelings: Organizing for Change

Get mad, then organize. Can feelings really help self-advocates make change? Sure. If you're mad about something, your anger can give you the drive to do something about the problem. It can motivate you to keep going, and it can give you the energy to stick with it until you make a change. If working with others gives you joy, that joy can keep you going in the movement.

But feelings aren't the whole solution. They can motivate you, but they **can't** give you a plan of action. This is where the skill of *organizing* comes in. Get together with others who have the same experience as you and make a plan of action. Here's Ed Roberts one more time:

"I learned a lot about organizing while I was at Berkeley. As a teacher's assistant, a small group of us organized a student strike in order to fight for reasonable wages. We held teach-ins and thousands of students skipped their classes. I realized then that a few people could really make a difference."

Ed went on to work with others in his community to get the first curb cuts in the nation and founded the *Independent Living Movement*.

Over the last 40 years, strong feelings have motivated self-advocates to make a lot of positive changes in society, including:

- Closing state-run institutions in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Staging sit-ins to get passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Supporting the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Getting curb cuts installed to improve lives for millions of people.

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5. Feedback from SARN Members

If you'd like to share your insight with other SARN members on the topic of feelings, please do so here. Perhaps you might address one of the following questions:

1. In your work with self-advocacy, what are some things that you get angry about? Can you describe one way that you used that anger to make positive change?

2. What makes you happy in your work with self-advocacy? Does this say something about your values?

3. Any other thoughts or insights you have on feelings and self-advocacy?

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Exercise: Feelings Exercise for Self-Advocacy Groups

It's important to be able to talk about our different feelings. They can be the starting point of successfully working together. Use the grid below as a way to invite folks in your group to talk about feelings they get in various settings of their everyday life. Make an enlarged copy for each person, then have folks gather in small groups to talk about and make notes in each square of the grid. "What is the one thing that makes you happy or glad at work?" – and so on.

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | Happy/Glad | Mad | Sad |
| Work | | | |

Home
Transportation
Relationships

After groups are finished, come together as a large group and do some comparing of notes. Look for any common themes. Those may be themes on which folks could spend more time exploring ways to work together.