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What makes us react

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Mr. Sharma, general manager of a medium-sized company, was one morning pacing the floor on his terrace situated on the 11th floor of his apartment complex. He was organising his thoughts and planning his schedule for the impending day. Suddenly, a young man barged into the terrace and said to Mr. Sharma, "Your daughter has eloped!" Mr. Sharma was shocked and began to cogitate about what people would say. Not able to tolerate the disgust, he leapt from the terrace. As he descended to floor 7, he suddenly realised that he was not married and therefore had no daughter. As he descended to floor 4, he realised that he was not Sharma but Varma.

Such is what happens to us when we react instantly without thought. Reacting largely results in an impetuous act most often harmful to us. We react because we are angered and cannot cope with our temper.

I often ask participants at training programmes to tell me how the length of the word 'respond' differs from the word 'react'. All participants who hear this request tell me that the word 'respond' is longer than 'react.' This, in essence, is therefore the way to cope with anger and its attendant feelings of disappointment and suchlike. The invitation is to allow the anger to settle in us and not immediately in a knee-jerk fashion; when we respond, we allow our thoughts and emotions to subside and thereafter express or act on the impulse generated. If we therefore respond instead of reacting, we will do so after examining the actual impact of our anger and in so doing, will have better control over what we say or do as a consequence..

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