

Expressing Anger

Caseworker, Marge is nearing retirement (in 2 years) and was obviously slacking off in her work in a child welfare agency. She was often late or absent, complained of constant medical problems, and was becoming a general nuisance in the agency. Other staff members were covering for her. Until recently, Marge had been an effective contributor to the work of the agency and had much to offer younger workers. In effect, the staff had prematurely retired her, saying, "We might as well wait until she quits." The supervisor had made the same decision but felt uncomfortable about it. The agency administrator also took the position that she only had two more years so the supervisor should just wait her out.

At a workshop session, members tuned in to Marge's feelings about retirement and ending her work life. The supervisor could see then that she had avoided discussing this area. In a role play, she practiced how she could stimulate discussion and explore the work-related issues facing Marge. The workshop participant who role played Marge's position presented an image of a woman overwhelmed by the situation. The supervisor responded with a proposal to rework her job description to include more opportunities to train other staff. She suggested that this might help make the last few years more interesting and productive for Marge, and it would give the agency a chance to draw on her years of experience. The worker in the role play kept coming up with excuses why she could not accept the suggestions, however, and it became a classic "Yes, but..." encounter. When the supervisor was asked how she felt as the worker stubbornly insisted on her helplessness to change or to try something new, she replied, "I feel like wringing her neck!" I pointed out that she could have fooled us. None of that had come through. I argued that feelings respond to feelings, and Marge might perceive a direct, honest expression of the supervisor's anger as her really caring. The cycle might be broken, if the supervisor could be honest. In response to a suggestion that she go back into the role play and say exactly what was on her mind, instead of censoring it until it sounded professional, her first line was:

No matter what I suggest, you find another reason why you can't do it. I'm really angry because you already have one foot out the door, and I think you have so much to give here at the agency. I don't want to just give up on you.

Adapted from Shulman, L. (2010). *Interactional Supervision*. pp. 118-119.