

Ryan O'Connor is the youngest Suffolk County police officer ever promoted to Sergeant.

Now in his late twenties, Ryan wants to marry his live-in lover, Casey, but she refuses. She says she does not want to be a policeman's wife; but Ryan knows the real reason is because of his temper. He has never hurt her, but he has blown up several times, kicking walls and throwing tools. Each time he repented and she forgave him.

Ryan has been prone to anger all his life. He got in big trouble in second grade when he threw a pair of scissors at a nun. He was suspended from the soccer team for shoving a referee. But for all the grief his temper has caused him, he has always relied on it to lead him in the right direction. His outrage at criminal activity creates a passion for his work that is unrivaled among his peers. His anger fuels his courage, once earning him the Governor's Certificate of Exceptional Valor for protecting a wounded fellow officer during a gun fight.

Recently, Ryan is picking up signs that his anger is getting out of control. Friends on the force have told him more than once to lay off someone. His superiors have hinted that he might not make lieutenant unless he cools down. And Casey told him she is moving out next time he goes off.

Ryan considered calling the department's Employee Assistance Section, but he is wary of tipping off his problem to anyone inside the force, and he certainly will not seek help from anyone outside. He is determined to control his anger himself, using his own power of will. He has started taking notes about what sets him off, and testing strategies for cooling down. He knows he has to be more careful when he is under stress or when he has had too much to drink. He counts to three when he feels his anger mounting; sometimes he says an Our Father. The thought that keeps him most under control is the vision of having to surrender his weapon.

He has been doing fairly well - at least on the outside - but rage boils up inside him just about every day.

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How does Ryan's anger help him in his work as a police officer? How does it hinder him in his work? and in his relationship with Casey?

What virtues are valued in the police department where Ryan works? Do you think the passion and courage that Ryan brings to his work are valued? Do you think he can sustain his passion while controlling his anger?

Do you think rational control over anger is valued in the department? Why is it important?

Do you think that Ryan's approach to controlling his anger can be successful? Why or why not? Should he try to reduce the frequency and intensity of his anger, or is it enough that he can control his behavior when he feels intensely angry?

Do you think that Casey is right to tell Ryan that she will leave him if he blows up again, or should she tolerate his outbursts so long as he is trying to control them? Why do you think so?