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## Prehn resigns from Natural Resources Board

**Laura Schulte**  
 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
 USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

MADISON — Frederick Prehn, a holdover from the Walker administration who refused to step down from the state Department of Natural Resources' policy-setting board after his term ended nearly two years ago, is resigning effective Dec. 30.



**Prehn** in a lawsuit seeking to oust him from the Natural Resources Board after his term ended in May 2021, informed Gov. Tony Evers of his intent to resign in a letter.

"It is time for the state legislators to act on Governor Evers nomination as soon as practical and it is now time for me to move on," Prehn wrote.

Evers' spokesperson Britt Cudaback said the governor's office did not have additional comment.

See **PREHN**, Page 2A

## Wis. woman shares her stiff person syndrome diagnosis

**Benita Mathew**  
 Appleton Post-Crescent  
 USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

WEYAUWEGA — When Sandy LeNoble saw Celine Dion sitting rigidly, holding back tears, telling the world she was diagnosed with stiff person syndrome in an emotional Instagram video, LeNoble knew it took many takes for Dion to get through filming.

LeNoble, 46, could feel her own

See **DIAGNOSIS**, Page 5A



## QUELLING OUR RAGE

Experts offer advice to counteract aggression

West De Pere High School freshman Marah Clark holds a sign that says "I'm tired and angry but somebody should be!" while protesting the school board's decision to resume in-person learning despite an ongoing surge in coronavirus cases in Brown County during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN FILE

**Natalie Eilbert** Green Bay Press-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

**D**r. Ryan Martin, a psychologist who has researched anger for more than two decades, found himself behind the wheel of his car on the freeway, fuming. • Martin had been making good time on his morning commute when his son, whom he'd just dropped off at school, texted to inform him that he'd left his backpack in the car. Martin would need to turn around. • His mind started racing. He'd be at least 30 minutes late. His morning would be ruined. He wouldn't get nearly enough done on a day already packed with meetings. The tumble of negative thoughts piled up. • Then he caught himself. • "I experienced the subtle shift of 'This is going to ruin my entire morning' to 'This is going to delay me.' I was able to plan to make up for whatever lost time it would take to turn around," Martin said. "Part of what happens when you're angry is you feel disempowered, so we have to try to find ways of taking some of that power back."

See **RAGE**, Page 3A

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### Packers vs. Dolphins

Outside of fake blunder, coach Matt LaFleur says special teams' play was strong. **Sports, 1B**

### Toast the holidays

Advice for home bartenders, plus four great festive cocktails. **Savor the Flavor, 4B**

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# Rage

Continued from Page 1A

It seems these days as if not enough people dial back the anger. And there's evidence to back it up. Service workers, from flight attendants to fast food employees, are encountering far more hostility and abuse from customers now than in recent years, said Martin, who works as a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

A study from Harvard Business Review found a sharp rise in frontline employees experiencing rudeness and incivility at work. Where in 2005, nearly half of service workers said they'd encountered incivility once a month, it was up to 76% as of August 2022.

The report, conducted and compiled by Christine Porath, author of the book "Mastering Community," cited several compounding factors: stress from the pandemic, the economy, war, divisive politics, the changing nature of work, and continued uncertainty; increasingly negative emotions; weakened ties to a community; our reliance on technology; and a lack of awareness, with ignorance, rather than malice, often leading to incivility.

"If people experience rudeness or bad behavior, or if they just simply witness it more pointedly, then they're likely to take it out on others. It's unconscious, so we don't necessarily recognize that," Porath said.

While there's no "anger thermometer" at our disposal, Martin has a strong feeling the answer to whether we've grown angrier is a big red "yes," based on the measurable indicators we do have.

That's not to say that anger is inherently bad; it can be a valid and useful emotion, and a catalyst for change in the face of injustice. It's also understandable for anyone to feel anger, particularly during what can be stressful situations — like the traffic, crowds and family pressure that accompany the holiday season.

But used indiscriminately — as it often is — anger can be unnecessary and harmful. And the impact is significant; there's strong evidence for the relationship between anger and health issues like hypertension, cardiovascular disease and unhealthy cholesterol levels.

## People became angrier during the COVID-19 pandemic

One watershed has been the CO-



**It's easier to respond with violence or aggression when you're protected inside of a car. Other drivers can't get a good look at you so it provides the illusion of anonymity.** MIKE DE SISTI/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

VID-19 pandemic, which upended life as we knew it. We were mad when we were masked or unmasked, when mandates shuttered local businesses or when mandates lifted, when schools went remote or when they opened back up. Day after day, it was a lose-lose situation, with anger the common denominator.

The Mighty, a community mental health platform founded by Mike Porath — Christine Porath's brother — surveyed more than 700,000 community members in March 2020 and again in September 2020 to determine their top three emotions surrounding the pandemic. The number of respondents who selected anger as their prevailing emotion more than doubled in the six months between surveys, rising from 20% in March 2020 to 45% in September 2020.

There's little indication that prevalence has eased.

Christine Porath said that one of the issues from her research that jumps out is the spike in stress and feeling overloaded, which she said is the "driver of bad behavior." And we're not even at the peak, Porath said.

"We're far less patient, far more frustrated, just at our breaking point. Unfortunately, we're taking in a lot of that negativity, and it's causing anger and other negative emotions in ways that I don't think we even recognize we're consuming," Porath said. "This isn't bad people behaving badly. We're just not aware of how we come off."

These behaviors aren't exclusive to adults, either.

More school fights are happening across the country. In a survey by the Institute of Education Sciences, which tracked behavioral changes in students

at public schools as a result of COVID-19, there was a 30% increase in fights among Midwestern students tied to the influence of the pandemic, while bullying increased by 28% and threats of violence increased by 38% for this same group.

## Trajectory humanity is on isn't healthy or sustainable, neuroscientist says

Anger happens "when an obstacle thwarts an important goal," said Richard Davidson, a world-renowned neuroscientist and founder of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

On a recent trip to India, Davidson visited the Dalai Lama to better understand our failure to flourish and thrive. After three weeks with the spiritual leader, it became clear that anger, of all human emotions, causes the most damage.

More than anything, Davidson sees anger as a symptom of a root problem. We've neglected to nurture what he calls the four key pillars of well-being: awareness, connection, insight and purpose.

"People are suffering from significant burnout. And I think most people would agree that the trajectory humanity is on is not a healthy or sustainable one," Davidson said. "The ship is really sinking, and we need to figure out a way to right this and introduce some modicum of balance. All of the major problems, in my view, stem from a failure to thrive, a failure to cultivate the core constituents of well-being."

## Road rage continues to rise in the United States and now they're becoming premeditative

One obvious manifestation is how we act in the place where we feel our most powerful and anonymous: our vehicles.

Brad Bushman, in addition to being a professor of communications, studies human aggression and violence at Ohio State University and has made anger his research focus for the last 30 years. Road rage — that is, a violent criminal offense distinct from aggressive driving — is on the rise in the United States, he said.

According to a new report from Everytown, deaths and injuries related to road rage have more than doubled since before the pandemic. In 2016, 73 people died and 166 were wounded as a result of road rage incidents; by 2021, those numbers had doubled to 131 and 391, respectively. In 62% of those incidents from 2021, guns were involved where, in 2016, 34% of road rage cases involved guns. That's not just a significant jump; it suggests these acts are becoming more premeditated than impulsive.

Frustration is a possible candidate of what causes road rage, according to Bushman, who cited the 1939 theory of Frustration Aggression Hypothesis. Davidson alluded to it when he said that anger takes place when an obstacle thwarts an important goal, but taking this further, the frustration turns to aggression, whether it's directed at the obstacle or is being displaced on something — or someone — else.

"When people are in their car, they have a goal. The frustration aggression hypothesis proposes that any obstacle to achieving your goal makes people prone to react with aggression, so you know, slow drivers or traffic jams do this," Bushman said.

Further, it's easier to respond with violence or aggression when you're protected inside of a car. Other drivers can't get a good look at you so it provides the illusion of anonymity. In other words, it becomes a place to hide while behaving badly, Bushman said.

See RAGE, Page 9A

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# Rage

Continued from Page 3A

## Behind the science on why we get mad and stay mad

As with other emotions, there's science involved.

Anger and all its big, messy feelings are created in a tiny, almond-shaped component of the brain called the amygdala. It's kind of like the body's emotional ambassador, taking information from other senses and sending messages to the hypothalamus, which pushes us into fight-or-flight mode, and the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for logic and rational thinking.

Martin said that when we get mad, the amygdala rushes through with the message "Hey! Get mad!" This message triggers a neural response in the hypothalamus, prompting us to react, while the prefrontal cortex puts out its proverbial hands and suggests taking some reasonable steps before acting too rashly.

"Of course, sometimes, one wins out. And people do things that they may regret or wish they hadn't done," Martin said.

Martin said anger is composed of a confluence of three factors: provocation, pre-anger feelings and interpretation or appraisal. There's the thing that happened, the mood you're in when you're provoked, and how you respond. If you're already tired and stressed, you're likelier to have a short fuse. If you're in a good mood, maybe you'll let the incident slide.

But the speed at which we appraise a situation can happen fast.

"Whenever something happens, we decide very, very quickly whether it's good or bad. Is it blameworthy? And punishable? How bad is it? Then, we react," Martin said. "Sometimes those decisions are right and we should be angry. Sometimes we get them wrong and are angry without adequate evidence."

Bushman's research focus considers the feedback loop of frustration and aggression, arguing that modes of venting anger only reinforce aggressive tendencies — instead of releasing them. Anger is characterized by high levels of physical arousal that can take a toll on our health. While there's pleasure in the act of catharsis, whether that means

punching and screaming into a pillow, taking your rage out in an online forum, or hitting a punching bag, Bushman said, it's like throwing gasoline on a fire.

Catharsis, it turns out, is more like anger's instigating cousin. It doesn't give us the relief we think it does. It just happens to feel really good. And it gives us a routine for our aggression to thrive, rather than a counteracting practice that quells the rage.

"Maybe you've heard the old joke, 'How do I get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.' How do you become an angry, aggressive person? The answer is the same: practice, practice, practice," Bushman said. "If you think about what people do when they vent, they just practice how to behave more aggressively: They yell, they hit, they kick, they scream, they shout — and practice makes perfect."

## Social media's 'continuous bombardment' hinders ability to thrive, negativity grows

Scroll through Twitter and it won't take long before you run into an aggrieved thread on systemic injustices, abuses of power, insults being flung across quote-tweets and sub-tweets. The rants across different social media platforms, Martin said, also give us something measurable in anger like never before.

Our agitations are on full display where, a century ago, no similar record existed. It's a blessing and a curse, experts said, allowing us to engage in seemingly infinite perspectives and ideas. But there's a down side when it causes more injury than empowerment.

In his TED Talk, "How mindfulness changes the emotional life of our brain," Davidson said distractibility feeds into our failure to thrive. Few tools at our disposal distract us more than social media. Rather than uplifting our voices, it has a tendency to hijack our goals, Davidson said.

"One of the consequences of social media and our continuous bombardment by all these external stimuli is that we are distracted, our attention is captured by this. And we get derailed from our intrinsic goals as a consequence," Davidson said. "This could make us irritable and angry because anger arises when our goals are thwarted."

Distraction impacts our well-being, and while we're distracted, we're ex-



**A group of North Fond du Lac School District residents against a mask mandate showed up at a special school board meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data shows that the pandemic raised the level of anger in adults and children.**

USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN-FILE

posed to mountainous negativity, said Christine Porath. As we scroll, retweet, like and comment, we're consuming negativity, and acting out according to what we've exposed ourselves to. In her studies on social media behaviors, Porath observes that people as a result are "less attentive, they're more on edge, they tend to engage in more dysfunctional behavior."

"It can also be an echo chamber," said Bushman, who said that venting on the internet doesn't bring us the kind of peace we'd get from processing an experience or opinion in a journal. If we vent in an echo chamber where others are either validating or challenging the anger you feel, Bushman said, does anger really have anywhere to go?

## Compassion, self-distancing can help in becoming more understanding, lower aggression

So, where do we go from here? One easy place to start is being aware of our patterns of aggression, Martin said.

Being able to identify the onset of anger and where we are in time and space when we're provoked can change our response from something catastrophic to rational and measured, the way Martin was able to realize that being set back a half hour in the car wouldn't undo his entire day.

Having more compassion doesn't

hurt either. The more we respond to somebody with kindness, even if they are pushing our buttons, the more it can improve not only our relationship with them, but the way they forge ahead with other relationships, according to Davidson, who has studied the effects of compassion on the brain.

Doing things that counteract aggression, such as helping somebody in need, petting a puppy or watching a favorite comedy, is much more productive than venting our frustrations on the internet or punching drywall, Bushman said.

Bushman has also studied the positive effects of self-distancing, using the analogy that a fly on the wall is less aggressive than the one buzzing around your head. When we're frustrated, we tend to ruminate, Bushman said, which is the equivalent of adopting a "self-immersed" perspective. This leads to over-analyzing the distressing experience, which brings back up all the accompanying negative feelings. Rather than resolving the issue, ruminating perpetuates it.

Angry people tend to lean forward and into the thing provoking them, Bushman said. The subtle shift of stepping back, whether that means changing your physical body language during an interaction or closing out the browser window where you're furiously typing a response, is a significant way of reducing the angry feeling.

Distance can allow us space and reflection, rather than immersion and rumination.

Martin said anger is evolutionary, and is ultimately meant to warn us of an imminent danger, not unlike the reaction caused by fear. But at our best, we can observe the anger at a distance and ask, "What is the anger telling me?"

"Once you answer that question, then you can ask, 'What should I do with it?' That can lead to better, more productive questions: 'Can I channel it into productive, pro-social solutions?'"

*Natalie Eilbert covers mental health issues for USA TODAY NETWORK-Central Wisconsin. She welcomes story tips and feedback. You can reach her at neilbert@gannett.com or view her Twitter profile at @natalie\_eilbert. If you or someone you know is dealing with suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 or text "HopeLine" to the National Crisis Text Line at 741-741.*



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