NAVIGATING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR REACTIONS AND RESPOND EFFECTIVELY

By Kathy Obear, Ed.D.
You don’t have to be miserable at work. You don’t have to fight every battle or suffer fools any longer. You don’t have to live in fear that your colleagues and supervisor will think you are incompetent when you are about to explode in anger or burst into tears.

This program will help you respond effectively in difficult situations and leave with your integrity intact.

I know you can control your emotional reactions because I have helped thousands of leaders navigate challenging, emotional workplace dilemmas.

My wish for you is to find the respect and joy you deserve at work. You can speak your truth and stand in your power. I hope you join me on this journey.
Dr. Kathy Obear has over 30 years of experience as an organizational development consultant and trainer specializing in creating inclusion, team and organizational effectiveness, conflict resolution, and change management. She has given speeches, facilitated training sessions, and consulted to top leaders at hundreds of universities, corporations, human service agencies, and K-12 organizations across the United States and internationally designed to increase the passion, competence, and commitment to create inclusive environments for all members of the organization. Kathy is regarded as an expert at training leaders and facilitators to navigate difficult dialogues and triggering events. She is a certified Life Coach and an Executive Coach and delights in supporting people to reach their potential and live their best life.

Kathy Obear, Ed.D.
THE SIX PART PROCESS

1. Recognize your triggers
2. Identify why you react
3. Change your story, change your reaction
4. Make different choices
5. Recover when you mess up
6. Maximize effective responses
The first step to having more control over your emotions at work is to recognize the types of situations and comments that set you off or make you want to shut down and leave. Knowing your “hot buttons” and “triggers” will not only help you anticipate and prepare how to better respond but also give you insights into how to avoid these incidents in the first place.

In this initial module you will identify the common difficult workplace situations in which you feel unexpected, intense emotional reactions and respond in unproductive ways. You no longer have to automatically react like this ever again. There is a way out.
IDENTIFY YOUR COMMON WORKPLACE TRIGGERS

Below is a list of common workplace triggers. As you read each item, use the following -10 to +10 scale to get an overall sense of how deeply triggered you might feel. Note your rating to the right of each item. The most extreme negative emotions are -10, such as rage, fear, deep grief, high anxiety, and deep shame or embarrassment. The most extreme positive emotions are +10, such as exuberance, overwhelming joy, and deep love.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(-) Negative Triggered Emotions</th>
<th>(+) Positive Triggered Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>High Moderate Mild Mild Moderate High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A WHEN SOMEONE (COLLEAGUE, DIRECT REPORT, SUPERVISOR, CLIENT, ETC.):

- Doesn't do what you ask or follow your instructions
- Doesn't acknowledge or respect your leadership
- Takes over as you are leading a meeting or making a presentation
- Doesn't follow through on what they said they would do
- Produces low-quality work
- Keeps making the same mistakes
- Is not very competent at their job
- Takes advantage of you
- Takes your idea and presents it as their own
- Takes credit for your work
- Keeps you out of the loop or excludes you from important conversations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lies to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in side conversations during meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is on their computer or cell phone during meetings when you are talking to them</td>
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<td>Gets distracted when they are talking to you</td>
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<td>Goes behind your back to undermine you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gossips about you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gets angry about what you said or did</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is moving too slowly, slowing down your agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tries to derail the planned approach or agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is late and keeps you waiting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interrupts you or others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignores your ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuts off the conversation before you have a chance to express your thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loves an idea only after someone else suggests something very similar to what you had recently said</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dismisses your ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rephrases or rewords your comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Corrects” you in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is belittling or demeaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is controlling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominates the air time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually brings the conversation back to their ideas and opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not consider your input and thoughts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Keeps pushing their point
- Is unwilling to listen to others
- Has a very blunt or impersonal style
- Has an aggressive or forceful style
- Disrupts the conversation with “jokes,” inappropriate laughter
- Makes snide, sarcastic, or passive aggressive comments
- Is arrogant or self-righteous
- Is patronizing or condescending
- Makes an insensitive or offensive comment
- Raises their voice to try to silence you or others
- Demonstrates bullying or threatening behavior
- Wants others to calm down, just “get over it,” and move on
- Accuses others of complaining when they raise concerns about exclusion or what is not working well
- Only focuses on how much progress has been made, rather than on how much more needs to change
- Shuts down and withdraws if you try to confront them
- Is “set in their ways” and unwilling to shift their perspective
- Pressures you or others to assimilate, fit in, and “not rock the boat”
- Mistakenly assumes someone else is the leader when you are
- Gives excuses or PLEs (Perfectly Logical Explanations) for disrespectful comments and behaviors
- Rationalizes away disrespectful and inappropriate treatment of others as individual incidents or the result of something the target of the behavior did or failed to do
- Defends others whose behavior is disrespectful and offensive
Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively

- Colludes and “goes along to get along”
- Will only focus on their “good intent,” and not the impact of their behavior
- Is only focused on themselves as a “good person” and refuses to acknowledge the cumulative impact of their repeated negative behaviors
- Refuses to consider feedback from you or others
- Debates and disagrees with everything you say
- Believes they are always right
- Pouts if they don’t get their way
- Challenges the validity of the information or statistics being presented
- Criticizes your style or approach
- Never gives any positive or appreciative feedback
- Questions your competency or that of others
- Gives unsolicited coaching or advice on how you should act, think, or feel
- Only appreciates and acknowledges other people’s work, not yours
- Is given a prime opportunity to advance but you are not, even though you have far more experience and competence
- Doesn’t volunteer for difficult team assignments and you end up doing all the work
- Does something unethical or dishonest
- Is talking loudly in an impromptu meeting outside your office or cubicle
- Introduces your peers with their titles or degrees, and introduces you by your first name
- Sends you a blasting, critical email and copies your supervisor
- Is more concerned with protecting their “turf” than achieving the overall goals
### When Your Supervisor or Manager:

- Insists on you doing something a certain way, then changes their mind after you have invested significant time and energy in the project
- Micromanages and second-guesses you
- Is controlling rather than inspiring and empowering
- Expects that you stop what you are doing and focus on what they want you to do
- Doesn't ask for your input in decisions that affect your work
- Doesn't give you as much guidance and direction as you ask for, and then is highly critical of the outcome you produced
- Expresses their disappointment in you, your work
- Gives you very vague, critical feedback
- Is more ego-driven than mission-driven
- Wastes your time in mismanaged meetings
- Doesn't pass along critical information from senior leaders
- Avoids holding all employees accountable for high-quality work
- Has favorites and “go to” members of the team
- Avoids making the hard decisions and makes you play the “bad cop”
- Does not hold people accountable for low quality work, poor performance
- Accuses you of something you did not do
- Gets defensive and argumentative
- Confronts you about your behavior but not others who do the same thing
- Expects you to work late and come in early for no additional compensation
▶ Is angry with you

▶ Is only concerned with “moving up the ladder” and “looking good” to the leader

▶ Gives you a challenging “stretch” assignment (something “positive” can still be triggering)

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**When you**

▶ Make a mistake or an error

▶ Do or say something inappropriate or offensive

▶ Do not know the answer to a question

▶ Don’t know what to say or do next

▶ Don’t have a solution to a problem

▶ Can’t figure out how to effectively respond in a difficult situation

▶ Believe the conversation is about to “get out of control”

▶ Are the only person to bring up controversial issues

▶ Have a strong opinion and no one else agrees with you

▶ Get promoted to an exciting new position (something “positive” can still be triggering)
**How do you react in less productive ways?**

**Directions:** Below, write about a recent difficult workplace situation in which you felt a wave of unexpected, intense emotions and you reacted “on automatic pilot” in a way you later regretted.

What happened?

How did you feel?

What did you do?
What was unproductive about your reaction? How did it negatively impact others?

As you look back, how would you have wanted to react in more productive ways?
The Triggering Event Cycle

1. A stimulus occurs.
2. The stimulus triggers our intrapersonal roots.
3. Our intrapersonal roots form a lens through which we make meaning of what we are experiencing.
4. Our cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions are shaped by our interpretation of what we experience.
5. The intentions that fuel our reaction are influenced by how we make meaning of the situation.
6. We react to the stimulus.
7. Our reaction may be an additional trigger for others and/or for us.
I used to think that everyone else caused my emotions. I gave all my power away when I said, “You made me angry!” or “You embarrassed me!” The truth is that other people’s comments and behaviors may “push your buttons,” but you have been carrying those buttons around, often for a long time.

In this module you will explore the 7 types of “intrapersonal roots” that fuel your automatic reactions. You no longer have to feel out of control and overwhelmed. You can take back your power and choose how you want to respond.
Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively
IDENTIFYING YOUR INTRAPERSONAL “ROOTS”

Directions: Think about a recent triggering situation in the workplace. As you review each of the 7 types of intrapersonal roots, make some notes about what you believe were possibly the various factors or “roots” that contributed to your feeling triggered.

1. CURRENT LIFE ISSUES AND DYNAMICS

When things are going well in our lives, we are generally less likely to feel triggered and we let comments “roll off our backs.” But when daily stressors build up and deplete our protective shield, we are far more likely to feel triggered. Examples of current life issues and dynamics include: financial concerns, fatigue and burnout, relationship dynamics, illness, problems at work or among family members, deadlines, and angst over national or world crises.

Question: A helpful question to ask ourselves when we feel triggered is, “How might the current dynamics and issues in my life be impacting my ability to feel centered and respond effectively in this moment?”

Directions: What are some of the current life issues and dynamics that may have contributed to your susceptibility to being triggered?
2. Cumulative impact of recent experiences

This intrapersonal root involves the cumulative impact from similar situations that occur within a short period of time, like the “final straw.” If we hold in or stuff our emotional reactions to earlier incidents, our feelings build up over time. The intensity of our triggered reaction in the moment may be disproportionate to the current circumstance because we are reacting out of the cumulative impact of several previous situations. These similar situations may be related to the same person or different people. They may have happened to us or to people we know and care about.

Question: To identify if we are experiencing cumulative impact, it may be helpful to ask ourselves, “How does this situation feel familiar?” or “How might this be connected to other recent events?”

Directions: What are some of the recent triggering situations that may have contributed to the cumulative impact you experienced in this moment?

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3. UNRESOLVED UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND OLD WOUNDS

I may have pushed my buttons, but I didn’t install them.

– Marshall Rosenberg

Current situations may reactivate memories and emotions from our past. If we do not feel resolved around past situations it is like we wear them on our bodies like “buttons” that can be pushed by others. When we have “hooked our history” we may unconsciously relive the past event in the moment. As a result, our triggered reactions are more directly connected to these unresolved issues, not necessarily to what is occurring in the present moment.

**Question:** During times I wonder if I may have restimulated old issues and wounds, it is useful to ask myself, “How, if at all, does this situation remind me of any old, unresolved issues or past traumas?” “Who comes to mind as I think about the possible connection between the current situation and old issues or wounds?” and “How is this person a mirror of me?”

**Directions:** Below, note the possible unresolved old issues and unfinished business that may have been retriggered in this situation.
4. Fears

When we are carrying any fear or anxiety into a situation we are more likely to feel triggered than during times we are centered, grounded, and confident. Deepening our capacity to identify the types of fears that may be driving our triggered reactions can help us more quickly recognize them in the moment and increase our ability to choose courage over fear.

**Question:** It is important that we identify the fears and anxieties that could be the root of our triggered reactions. Helpful questions to ask include, “What am I afraid could happen?” and “What am I afraid of losing?” After recognizing each fear, it can be useful to use the tool called the “Ladder of Fear” to search for any deeper issues or anxieties by asking over and over, “So if this fear were to come true, then what else am I afraid could happen?”

**Directions:** Review each fear below and check off (✓) all that feel familiar to you:

- My personal issues will become the focus of the conversation: all eyes will be on me
- I will lose credibility
- If I cry and show emotion, people will think less of me
- I won’t be able to manage the situation
- The conversation will “get out of control”
- I won’t know enough
- If I challenge, I will be alone without any support
- I won’t be able to express myself clearly; I’ll be misunderstood
If I am too confrontational or angry, then people will judge me, be mad at me, reject me, ostracize me, etc.

I will be seen as incompetent and “not good enough”

I’ll let people down

People won’t like me or approve of me

Things won’t change

I will make a mistake and be wrong

People will be disappointed in me

If I don’t handle this well, people could be hurt

Things will be worse off than before
5 Unmet needs/What I value

I am grateful to Marshall Rosenberg for his work in NVC, Nonviolent Communication, in which he identified a full range of needs and values that he believed to be universal human needs. If some of our core needs or values are not being met in a situation, we could be triggered.

**Question:** When we feel triggered it is helpful to pause and search for any of our unmet needs or values. Helpful questions include, “What might be my unmet needs in this moment?” and “What do I value that is not being honored right now?”

**Directions:** Think back to a situation at work in which you behaved in ways you wished you hadn’t. Check off (☑) all of the needs and values that were not being met in this triggering situation, and add any additional ones below:

- Respect, dignity
- Trust
- Planning, order
- Fairness
- Clarity, understanding
- Openness, honesty
- Direct communication
- Respectful disagreement
- Recognition, acknowledgment
Appreciation
Competence, effectiveness
Success, to make a difference
To be kept informed and updated
Harmony, peace of mind
Safety, security
Integrity
Innovation and creativity
Ease and simplicity
Connection
Mutuality, partnering, collaboration
Approval
Acceptance, belonging
Inclusion
Consideration
Dependability, follow-through
6 EGO-DRIVEN DESIRES

As many of us were growing up we may have learned some very useful skills and tools to take care of ourselves and navigate our lives. However, it is also common that we also developed some unproductive survival strategies in response to any number of dysfunctional and unsafe situations. Although some of these beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors may have helped keep us safe and out of harm's way in the past, most likely they are no longer productive approaches for meeting our core human needs of self-worth, safety, belonging, and mattering.

I use the term “ego-driven desires” to describe this intrapersonal root and the constellation of dysfunctional thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that often fuel ineffective triggered reactions. In contrast to the needs and values that add value to our lives and those of others, these ego-driven desires often result in win-lose, power-over situations that only “benefit” some at the expense of others.

**Question:** In moments when our triggered reactions are fueled by ego-driven desires, we are over-focused on getting what we want and may have little or no concern for the needs of others or how our behaviors negatively impact them. Questions to examine if we are reacting out of ego-driven desires, include: “Am I focused on what would be helpful to others or on what I think should happen, regardless of the impact on them?” “Am I more concerned about how I will be judged and evaluated than on achieving productive goals and outcomes?” and “Am I over-emphasizing my desire for acceptance, approval, and control with little thought to how my actions impact others?”

**Directions:** Which of these ego-driven desires might have been fueling your reaction?

- To assert, regain my power and authority
- To have control
- To win the argument, prove them wrong
To get your way

To make people change, “fix” them

To make people learn

To be right

To shut them down, put them in their place

To make them feel the pain and hurt you feel

To be seen as the expert, smart

To prove you are competent

To gain prestige and status

To be admired, avoid disgrace

To be liked

To fit in

To be seen as a “good one,” an ally

To be perfect

To gain certainty and predictability

For everyone to feel happy

To avoid deep emotions and conflict

To make others engage as you want them to
7. Biases, Assumptions, Expectations, Shoulds, and Judgments

Whether we know it or not we all carry baggage with us into every situation—baggage full of our biases, assumptions, expectations, and judgments. Most of these attitudes and beliefs are grounded in our past experiences and cloud our ability to accurately assess what is occurring in the present moment.

**Question:** Questions to explore include, “What assumptions am I making?” “What biases might be affecting my assessment?” “What ‘shoulds’ and expectations am I placing on others, or on myself?” “What is my ‘pay-off’ for judging and criticizing in this moment?” “How am I just like this person?” and “What am I trying to avoid in me by over-focusing on them?”

**How do your triggered feelings shift, if at all, when the source of the trigger changes?**

The social identity groups of the person whose behavior is the source of the trigger is usually a significant factor in how emotional we feel. We may be more or less reactive given the person’s particular combination of various group memberships, including their age, hierarchical position, years of experience, race, sex, gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic class, disability status, religion/spiritual practice, etc. Given the same behavior, we give some people a pass and the benefit of the doubt, while for others we have a more intense emotional response.

**Directions:** As you read each of the following situations, anticipate how triggered you might feel given the different social identity groups of the various people involved. In addition, note 1-2 reasons for your reactions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triggering situation</th>
<th>Group identities of the person making the comment</th>
<th>Rate the intensity of your emotions and the reasons for this level of reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A. Your supervisor</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. One of the youngest members of the group.</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. A good friend of yours</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A. Your supervisor</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Someone who is a different sex or race than you.</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. An older male colleague you do not particularly like</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A. A long-term employee who is female</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. A brand new employee who is male</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. The secretary to the manager</td>
<td>-10 To +10</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively
SOCIAL IDENTITY GROUPS MATTER

Directions: Think about a difficult workplace situation in which you had an intense emotional reaction and make some notes below:

A  Briefly describe the situation.

B  How intense was your emotional reaction on the scale -10 to +10?

C  What were the key social identity groups of the key people involved?

D  Imagine what different social identity groups of those involved might have resulted in you:
   - Feeling less emotional?
Feeling more emotional?

Why do you think you might have had these varying reactions, given the different social identity groups of those involved?

As you continue to reflect on your common triggers, it is useful to think about the following questions:

Do you have the same level of emotional reactions to everyone who exhibits this behavior?

Are there patterns related to the social identity groups of the people involved in these difficult situations that may cause you to feel more or less emotional?
YOU CAN SHIFT YOUR STORY

Directions: Use the same triggering situation you wrote about in the previous activity as you use the following prompts to explore the impact of changing the “story” we create:

Describe “just the facts” of the situation, the circumstances

What did you make it mean? What was the story you created?

What intrapersonal roots may have fueled your interpretation?

What feelings did you generate with this particular story?
How did you react less productively? What was your impact?

Can you imagine a different interpretation of the same situation that leaves you feeling less triggered? Possibly more curious, understanding, or open?

Rewrite your initial story below.

Given this new interpretation, how might you feel? What other responses might you consider from this new perspective?
I woke up with a start and immediately felt deeply anxious as I realized my alarm hadn’t gone off and I was an hour late to an important meeting! Then I put on my glasses and realized I had misread the clock and it was actually two hours earlier that I had thought. In the space of a single moment, I went from feeling deeply anxious to feeling relieved and delighted I could go back to sleep! The clock hadn’t changed. It was my interpretation of what I thought I saw that created my different emotional reactions.

In every situation we make up a “story” about what we think is happening. Our story creates our feelings, physiological “warning signs” that we are triggered, and our thoughts about ourselves and others. If we change our story, we change our reactions.

In this module you will practice shifting your initial story and changing your automatic emotions, thoughts, and physical reactions.
SHIFT YOUR REACTIONS BY CHANGING YOUR STORY

**Directions:** Use the following prompts to write about a recent triggering situation.

Describe “the facts” of the situation, the circumstances.

What did you make it mean? What “story” did you make up about what you thought was happening?

When you think about this initial story:

- What are your emotions?
What are your physiological reactions?

And what thoughts do you have about:

- Yourself?
- Others?
- The situation?
Shift your story: Create a different interpretation that leaves you feeling less triggered and possibly more open, receptive, and curious.

Imagine the same situation, but with your new interpretation, your new story. Now what are your:

- Physiological reactions?
- Emotions?
- Thoughts about self, others, and the situation?
IDENTIFY YOUR COMMON EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

Directions: Think back over a variety of difficult situations in which you felt triggered as you note your responses to the following prompts:

What are some of your common triggered emotions?

What are your common physiological reactions that signal you feel triggered?

What are some of the common, unproductive thoughts you have during triggering situations:

➤ About yourself?

➤ About others?

➤ About the situation?
**Self-management tools ~ Changing your thoughts**

The unproductive thoughts we have during triggering situations can decrease our effectiveness in the moment. When we change these thoughts we are better positioned to choose effective responses. Below is an example of how to change some of your triggered thoughts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When you think:</th>
<th>You can shift your thoughts to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They're not getting it! This is a failure!</td>
<td>I will do the best I can. I am not responsible for everyone's learning. People will take away from here what they need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I should know the answer to that!</td>
<td>I am not the expert here. My role is to facilitate the team's creativity. I can say, “I don't know,” and ask others for their input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are such a <em>%^</em>#!!* for interrupting me!</td>
<td>I don't appreciate his timing, but at least he is willing to engage in this dialogue. He seems to have a lot of energy about this topic so maybe he has some good ideas to add.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Directions:** Think about a recent triggering situation and use the space below to write several unproductive thoughts you were thinking at that time. Then identify alternative thoughts that could leave you feeling less triggered, if not more open and curious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When you think:</th>
<th>You can shift your thoughts to:</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>
I was presenting an innovative idea I believed would help us leap ahead of our competition. As I was beginning to describe the critical aspect of my plan, the president abruptly interrupted me and turned to his “go-to” vice president and asked, “What do you think about this?” I was so angry I couldn’t think straight! I thought the president was trying to undermine me and put me in my place. I immediately started to doubt the brilliance of my ideas and felt my enthusiasm drain away as I wanted to just disappear. Luckily, I caught myself in this self-destructive spin and thought instead, “Maybe he is trying to get the support of this key partner so that the others will go along. Or maybe he needs this vice president to buy-in so I can successfully launch my idea. He is helping me out!” From this new perspective I felt much more confident and turned to listen to what my colleague added. I then asked the president what he thought and what suggestions he might have. As we explored these options together we created a solid plan that had the backing of everyone at the table.

Our actions follow our thoughts and intentions. My negative thoughts led to my intention to get small and disappear. My productive thoughts led to the intention that together we could create an even better outcome. Just like using a GPS, you have to set your destination before you can know how to get where you want to go. If you choose unproductive thoughts and intentions, you will most likely react in ways you later regret. If you choose productive thoughts and intentions, you will respond more effectively in difficult situations and be more likely to achieve positive results.

In this module you will identify common unproductive intentions and practice shifting them so you choose responses that facilitate better communication, teamwork, and productivity.
Identify some of your less productive, “negative” intentions

When I am more aware of my common negative, unproductive intentions I am more likely to notice when I am about to react out of them in the moment. This split second of awareness can be enough for you to shift your thinking and choose to focus on more productive intentions.

Directions: As you review the following list, think about a few times you have reacted less effectively when you felt triggered. Check off (☑) any of these less productive intentions that seem familiar to you:

- Win the argument
- Get even, get them back
- To be right, prove the other person wrong
- To prove you are competent, smart
- Assert your power and authority
- Gain status and prestige, be admired
- Be in control
- Intimidate the other person
- “Put them in their place”
- Shut them down
- Punish the other person
- Embarrass or put them down
Make them feel the pain you feel

Change the other person’s views, feelings, or behaviors

To make people learn

Trick and “outfox” the other person

Keep the conversation “under control”

Avoid intense emotions, in self and others

Make everyone feel happy and harmonious

Avoid feeling or being viewed as “incompetent”

Control how others feel about you

Use the current opportunity to “right the wrongs” you experienced in the past

Ignore them

Seek approval of others

Be liked, fit in

Avoid confrontation and conflict
Add any others that come to mind:

Below, imagine thinking some of these negative intentions. How might you react out of these unproductive intentions?
IDENTIFY SOME OF YOUR MORE PRODUCTIVE, “POSITIVE” INTENTIONS

Directions: Below is a list of some of the more productive and “positive” intentions we can choose. Check off (✓) any that you commonly think about during triggering situations. Star (*) any you would like to add to your “tool kit.”

- Engage in respectful dialogue
- Create greater inclusion
- Facilitate open, honest discussion
- Do no harm
- Leave people feeling whole
- “Go with the flow,” trust the process
- Deepen learning and growth
- Meet people “where they are” without judgment
- Use the triggering moment to deepen understanding
- Relate to the person, connect with them
- Invite people to learn from the situation
- Model the values you espouse: respect, authenticity, empathy, self-reflection, engagement...
Create space for the other person to express their feelings, perceptions

Deepen understanding across differences

Acknowledge they are doing the best they can with the resources and knowledge they have at this moment

Create safety for the expression of differing viewpoints

Encourage more people to engage in the discussion

Support people to disagree with each other in respectful ways

Model effective recovery skills when your behavior results in negative impact

Re-establish credibility with the person or group

Interrupt unproductive, inappropriate behaviors and group dynamics

Take time to “gather yourself”

Build a “bridge” and a connection with the other person

Create more effective relationships and coalitions
Add any others that come to mind:

Below, imagine thinking some of these positive intentions. How might you respond out of these intentions?
PRACTICE SHIFTING NEGATIVE INTENTIONS TO MORE POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE ONES

Directions: Think about a recent triggering situation in which you reacted unproductively. Make your notes below using the following prompts:

1. **In section #1:** Write out 1–2 of the less productive, negative intentions you had in that moment.

2. **In section #2:** Write how you reacted less effectively out of these negative intentions.

3. **In section #3:** Rewrite these negative intentions into more productive ones.

4. **In section #4:** Anticipate how you MIGHT have responded more productively out of these more positive, productive intentions.

1. My less productive, “negative” intentions
2. How I reacted less productively, less effectively

3. More productive, “positive” intentions

4. How I MIGHT have responded more productively out of these intentions
**SHIFTING LESS EFFECTIVE REACTIONS TO MORE PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES**

**Directions:** Below, make notes about three triggering situations in which you reacted unproductively.

- Column 1: What was the triggering situation?
- Column 2: How did you react less productively?
- Column 3: What would have been a more effective response?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Triggering situation where you reacted unproductively</th>
<th>Your less effective reactions</th>
<th>What might have been more productive responses?</th>
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We all make mistakes and react in ways that may destroy our working relationships, team effectiveness, and our reputation. I so often wish I had a “do-over” and I could rewind the tape and start over. Or I want to push the fast forward button so no one will notice what I did or have a chance to react.

In this module you will practice different “recovery skills” to help you rebuild what may have been damaged when your triggered reactions negatively impacted others.
SHIFTING LESS EFFECTIVE REACTIONS TO MORE PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

Directions: Reflect on a recent triggering, difficult situation in which you reacted unproductively. Below, identify 3–5 recovery tools that may help you repair and rebuild the damage of your impact.

| 50 |

Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively | 50 |
You lose so much of your time, energy, and organizational capital when you over-react and mismanage difficult situations. You can take specific steps to decrease the intensity of your triggered reactions and even eliminate your hot buttons.

I wish I had just taken a moment before I answered his question that challenged both my research and the project plan. But I was so tired from finishing up the presentation at 3am and was still getting over the flu that I just didn't have it in me to pause or ask a question to give myself time to think. I just snapped and, raising my voice, “put him in his place!” It took me months to rebuild that relationship and regain his trust and respect. As I look back I realize that his question retriggered a memory of the times this one professor would publically critique my work and never give me any positive feedback. Once I unhooked these memories from my experiences with my colleague and did some healing work to take the sting out of those past situations, I was not as triggered by him anymore. In fact, we are beginning to create a powerful partnership on a couple of projects.

You can learn tools to deactivate the power of old issues and unresolved situations that fuel your triggered reactions. In this module you will identify strategies to heal your intrapersonal roots and redesign your life so you respond in intentional, deliberate ways that bring you the respect and dignity you deserve.
YOUR PLAN FOR BETTER SELF-CARE AND HEALING YOUR INTRAPERSONAL ROOTS

How will I take better care of my health? (sleep, exercise, stress management, doctor appointments, religious/spiritual practice, etc.)

How will I eat (and drink) in ways that are better for me?
How will I create a better work/life balance?

How will I work with others or alone to resolve unfinished business from my past and heal old wounds?
Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively
Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace: How to control your reactions and respond effectively
If you are interested in inviting me to speak to the members of your organization or if you would like to explore ways to work with me as an Executive Coach or Life Coach, please contact me:

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