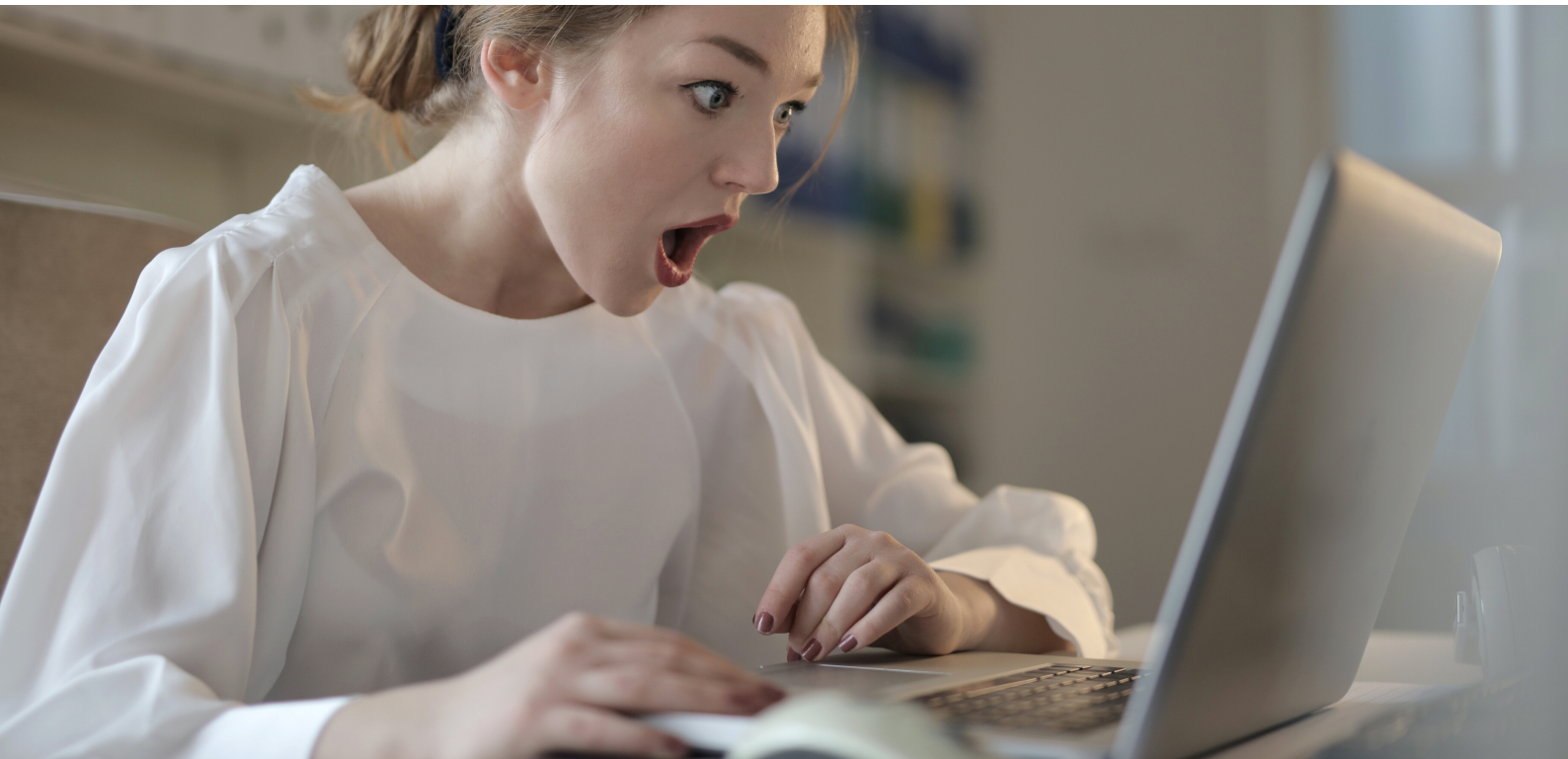




HOW TO AVOID BEING EMOTIONALLY HIJACKED

Effective Leadership Through Emotional Intelligence

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Can you think of a person who is incredibly intelligent, yet really struggles in their job or in relationships? I'm talking about a person with a ton of book smarts but very little street smarts. Chances are, the person you're thinking of has a high IQ but a much lower EQ – or what is more commonly known as emotional intelligence. This is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict.

Daniel Goleman, the father of emotional intelligence, sums it up nicely, "The most effective leaders are all alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader."

And 30 years of EQ research would support this. Study after study demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leaders a) have higher job satisfaction, b) are more effective employees, c) outperform and earn more than their colleagues, and d) live with higher confidence, resilience, and happiness.

The great news is that although our IQ is more or less fixed once we're an adult, our EQ can grow with age and experience. And, through focus and training, we can make strides in the development of our EQ.

This starts with learning to avoid what is referred to as an "emotional hijack". This is when we are triggered by something and have an emotional response that is out of proportion to the situation. For example, I have to go grocery shopping during this COVID-19 time of social distancing and seeing the masks, the lack of toilet paper, and other peoples' lack of responsible behaviour triggers an emotional reaction of anxiety and fear that I have a hard time shaking for the rest of the day. Or just before bed as I go to brush my teeth, I find that my spouse hasn't rinsed the sink out properly and left a big glob of toothpaste for me to deal with. I'm annoyed by this but as I continue to brush my teeth, I start to also feel that my spouse isn't respecting my time. By the time I am ready for bed, I'm pretty much ready for a divorce.

Daniel Goleman explains that we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels. When the "feeling brain" is triggered and our emotional intelligence is low, it takes over – or hijacks – our "thinking brain" and we will normally choose one of three options: fight, flight or freeze.

So how do we avoid being emotionally hijacked? Here's a simple but effective 3-step strategy:

#1 - **INTERRUPT** – The first thing to do when we realize we're being emotionally hijacked is to interrupt the "feeling brain" and wake up the "thinking brain." Something as simple as taking 3 deep breaths or counting backwards from 10 can work.

#2 - **GET CURIOUS** – Once our “thinking brain” is back in action, start to ask yourself a few simple questions: How do you feel (scared, angry, hurt...)? What event or behaviour caused this feeling? Why did that event or behaviour cause this feeling?

#3 - **CHOOSE** – Moving forward, how do I want to behave or deal with the situation?

Once we start to deploy this 3-step strategy to avoid being emotionally hijacked it gets easier each time we try. We also learn more about what triggers us and why, and as a result, we find ourselves being less triggered as time goes by. Our emotional intelligence and our resiliency begins to grow.

Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl provides the best explanation of why avoiding emotional hijacks and growing in our emotional intelligence is worth the time and energy required:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Viktor Frankl



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