



Jeff Saari, seen here during a workout at Fit Nation in Keene, advises business owners to learn self-management techniques.

Take control of triggers at work

BY JEFF SAARI / PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL GNADE

culminate in a propensity to feel a trigger. Some routine situations that cause us stress are: organizational power dynamics and politics; too much work to do; unclear direction; lack of communication; technology woes; differing personalities and perspectives; poorly run meetings; problem behaviors; as well as a multitude of other scenarios.

I recently created what I call the “STARR model” to explain how triggers seem to work. STARR is an acronym for stimulus, trigger, action, result and repeatable pattern. We have already seen that when our needs, desires or expectations aren’t met (stimulus), we feel an adverse feeling (trigger). This leads us to take action and get a result. Usually this is a repeatable pattern.

In the example above of the complaining coworker, we know that the complaining is the stimulus and anxiety or frustration is the trigger. Let’s say you then avoid the person, tune out or roll your eyes and walk away. This would be the action you have taken to deal with the feeling. The result is a poor working relationship and feeling disconnected from the coworker and within yourself. Over and over again this happens, making it a repeatable pattern. And, to put the icing on the cake, you probably blame the coworker for your stress and complain to others about him, thus perpetuating the very same behavior you disdain in him.

In my coaching work I have asked hundreds of individuals and teams of people if they want to have stress and negativity in their lives. Nobody has ever raised their hand. This is curious because most everyone *has* some negative stress in their lives.

I also ask people: “Who is in charge of your well-being?” Of course, everyone *says* that they are in control of themselves. Theoretically and rationally we know that we control ourselves, but when the rubber hits the road and we are triggered, all bets are off. We act in ways that don’t support our desired outcomes, all the while blaming others for our misfortunes.

But, as John Yokoyama, author of “When Fish Fly,” said, “Blame is a lousy teacher.” Fortunately, acting from a trigger is not the only option available to us. We can take control of our inner world even if we can’t always control

the outer. This is worthy of inspection because, after all, nobody really wants to feel stressed.

In the interface between having an adverse feeling from a non-ideal stimulus and taking a non-supportive action, can be a pause, what I call a calming tactic. This is an action you will take to calm down your trigger first, before rolling your eyes at your coworker. Taking a couple of deep breaths, taking a pause or break, taking a walk to the water cooler, saying a catchphrase in your head, etc., are ways to keep you more calm and collected.

Think about something that would fit for you to calm yourself down and employ it immediately. By doing this there will be a little wiggle room to think rationally about the situation and take an action that will actually support your desired result.

What is your desired result? Your triggers are actually messages in a bottle for you to take out and read. They can shed a light on how a less-than-ideal situation would look if it was to your liking.

Once you understand what you are doing in reaction to a stimulus, you can ask yourself what result you really want in the future. Is it for your coworker to stop complaining around you? Instead of the actions that don’t support your desired result (tuning out, avoiding, eye rolling), one inspired action you could take is to give the person feedback about his behavior.

Delivering feedback itself can be scary (another trigger), but if you don’t do anything different it most likely will persist. You get to show up for what you truly desire, take a risk and speak up to hopefully effect a change in your world. Believe it or not, most times when feedback is given properly people tend to be receptive to it and desire not to impact us negatively.

That sums up triggers in a nutshell. You get to shake hands with your triggers and thank them for showing you what you really want. In short, you put your triggers to work for you, instead of against you.

Having triggers at work may not stop, but putting them to work for you can start, allowing you to live more in your baseline feelings and effect great working relationships with others. ■

Work life can be challenging to say the least, even downright precarious. Situations arise, or are ongoing, that leave us feeling anxious, frustrated, jealous or scared, as well as many other adverse emotions. In short, we get triggered.

These feelings sometimes overtake us and lead us to take actions that don’t get us the results we want in our organizational relationships. Why is this so? And what, if anything, can we do about it?

This article explores a model for trigger management that can potentially keep us from reacting to life and able to stay in control of ourselves.

Most of us feel pretty calm, caring, rational and happy-go-lucky most of the time (what I call our baseline feeling). We plug away, giving our best to the job and feel good about our work life. Then, for instance, a vendor is going to be late with your product, causing your energy to shift from your baseline feeling to feeling anxious or frustrated about being able to fill your customer’s order on time.

Or a coworker’s consistent complaining has you anxious just by the thought of seeing him at work that day. The feelings you feel in *reaction* to a non-ideal stimulus is what I call a trigger. In the first case, the late product is the stimulus and the trigger is anxiety or frustration. In the second, the thought of the coworker’s complaining is the stimulus and anxiety is the trigger.

Our unmet expectations, desires and needs