

10 Ways to Avoid Emotional Hijacking and Improve Your Mental Health

We've all been there. Perhaps it was that email response you later regretted or snapping at a colleague undeservedly. Have you ever gone ballistic when someone inexplicably cuts you off on the highway? Road rage and other emotion-driven regrets are classic examples of emotional hijacking.

Emotional hijacking occurs when someone or something triggers a stress response causing the amygdala, the part of the brain that serves our emotional processor, to hijack or bypass your normal reasoning process. The result is a sudden and unconscious intense emotional response.

In social situations, the impact and consequence of hijacked emotions are high. Relationships become strained and reputation damaged. In addition, there is a negative impact on your brain, body, and self-concept. This forms the seeds of self-doubt, fear, lack of confidence, and more stress becoming a pattern. The good news is that you can learn to live a more prosperous and joyful life when you know how to manage your emotions.

Research shows that underlying stress is one of the major risk factors in the rampant increase in mental health disorders. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 450 million people currently suffer from some form of mental illness.

The key to avoiding emotional hijacking is grounded in self-awareness which is one of the core components of emotional intelligence. Without self-awareness, you are doomed to repeat the same mistakes for the rest of your life.

Consider these examples of adverse outcomes due to hijacked emotions:

- They can trigger us to do or say something inappropriate that we later regret.
- Wild emotions sabotage our ability to make complex, rational decisions and blind us from seeing the perspectives of others.
- Overextended emotional responses can also be damaging to your brain and physiological health.
- Memory and recall become compromised.
- It compromises your leadership potential and respect of others.

On the flip side, avoiding emotional hijacking offers advantages such as:

- Prevent communication challenges in your personal and professional life. I'm sure you'll agree that life is stressful enough as it is.
- You'll build stronger relationships with others in the workplace and in your personal life.
- Empowered communication skills help you enjoy more peace and happiness in your life.
- You will earn the respect of your team and co-workers for handling difficult situations.
- You build the emotional discipline needed for future disruptions and stressful situations.
- Your mental and physical health begins to improve.

Of course, there is no magic wand to get instant results. Mastery calls for the intention of purpose and practice to achieve it.

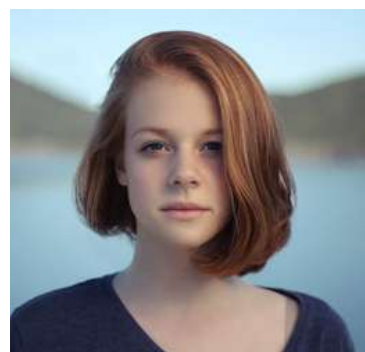
11 easy steps to avoid emotional hijacking

With practice, these strategies will help you master your emotions:

1

BECOME MORE AWARE OF YOUR EMOTIONS

Awareness is the critical first step to conquer to avoid feelings from interfering with your brain's cognitive function and ability to make sound decisions. It requires practice to become more self-aware that your emotions are triggered. One powerful tool to develop self-awareness is to keep a journal to capture meaningful moments in your day, including challenges.



Reflect on what you think caused them. Then ask yourself:

- What did I do well?
- What did I do poorly?
- What changes do I want to make?
- How will I make those changes?

If this sounds like work, keep in mind that 15 minutes each evening is an investment that will pay off. After all, it's much easier to put out a small fire than a big one. Catch yourself as quickly as possible.

Journaling is only one of several steps that help build self-awareness. The best recommendation is to test your EQ (emotional quotient) and determine the specific approaches you can take instead of throwing darts in the dark. Contact us here to learn more.

2

PAUSE AND BREATHE

It only takes 10-15 seconds for the most part, and it is the best way to collect yourself and avoid doing or saying something you'll regret later. As easy as it sounds, it can be challenging in the heat of the moment because emotions are powerful and can easily take control.



The key is to catch it early enough to allow yourself to pause and do calming breathing techniques. Consider it a form of self-care. The more self-aware you become, the more you'll be able to stop and take a breath before responding. Think of all the trouble you could've saved yourself over the years.

3

REDUCE STRESS

Stress leads to burnout and fuels anxiety and depression making us more vulnerable to emotional hijacking. Doing what it takes to reduce stress is critical for your brain and body. The stressed brain prioritizes old habits and routines over purposeful, deliberative action to save energy and cognitive resources.



This means you will fall back on old habits which you worked so hard to eliminate. Habits require less mental effort highlighting the importance of constantly practicing to create new patterns, which will be your default. Take deliberate steps to identify the source of the stress - not just the symptoms but the root cause. Here are three preliminary steps you can take to mitigate your stress.

- **Exercise.** A good workout encourages your brain to release dopamine and serotonin hormones, improving your emotional state of mind and reducing stress. Tony Robbins is known to say 'motion creates emotion,' so when it comes to emotional hijacking, you need to break the tendency to freeze, lock your bodies up, and not move. It is essential to break the body's state and shift it by moving outside or to another room for a moment.

3

REDUCE STRESS - continued

- **Meditate.** For many people, meditation is a popular way to reduce stress because it triggers the body's relaxation response. It is the practice of focused concentration, bringing yourself back to the moment repeatedly to reduce stress. You learn that thoughts and emotions come and go. Start by observing them, and you'll see how they fade on their own and realize you don't have to react to them.
- **Sleep.** Without the appropriate amount of sleep, your ability to function at your peak declines significantly. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you're immune to this phenomenon. Adequate sleep unlocks resilience and provides many other physical health benefits, such as heightened immunity and a lower risk of cancer and heart disease, among many others.

4

DETERMINE YOUR TRIGGERS

An important part of self-awareness is identifying other people's behavior that affects you negatively. These are stressors, and everyone is wired differently. It is important to note that what might trigger you may not trigger someone else and vice versa. This does not invalidate the emotion and effect of the person experiencing them.

The point is to identify trigger points and develop a strategy for addressing them. Start by making a list of behaviors that trigger you emotionally. Ask yourself these questions:

When are you most likely to lose control? At work?

- At home in the evening?
- With your in-laws? Neighbors?
- Is it specific situations or sources like the news, social media, others?

Notice your emotional patterns and do what you can to minimize your responses in those situations. Visualize in advance how you could respond to those triggers in advance. Visualization is a way to practice and build more productive habits that you can call on when you need them.



5

KEEP YOUR EGO IN CHECK

A healthy ego is essential for our self-esteem and self-confidence. In Scientific America, Barry Kaufman defines Ego as “that aspect of self that has the incessant need to be seen in a positive light.” There is a tendency to confuse ego with confidence, and we should make sure to take note of the slight differences.



Ego only becomes an unpleasant trait once it climaxes to an exaggerated feeling of self-importance. Often the emotional responses are indicative of a fragile or inflated ego. Perhaps you felt ignored, mistreated, or slighted in some way. Or think that someone didn't act in a manner you considered appropriate.

“Ego is an over-dressed insecurity.” - Quincy Jones

The best antidote to avoid losing control of your emotions is to work on developing a healthy ego. To do this, you have to be proactive in developing emotional intelligence to ensure your ego stays in check. Be willing to accept advice whether you made a mistake or not. Resist taking things personally. It could be coming from someone who is genuinely trying to help. Check for these signs of an unhealthy ego:

- You take things personally too quickly.
- You tend to interrupt others a lot.
- You have no sense of gratitude.
- You must always win.
- You detest criticism.
- You constantly compare yourself to others and feel you are better than them.
- You love to take credit for success.
- You are too defensive.

Unchecked, the ego creates fear that becomes worse over time. It will rule your life, and you'll never find peace and the joy of understanding how to manage others and how to build relationships.

6

THOUGHT-AWARENESS

Your thoughts will either help you or hurt you. Being aware of your thoughts is crucial because negative thoughts can be crippling unless you tame them. It is also important to question the direction of your thoughts.



Challenge yourself as to whether each one is reasonable. Doing so allows you to make space for rational thinking and make the right decision in your response. Without challenging yourself, there is only reinforcement of the status quo.

Research from the National Science Foundation found that 95% of the thoughts you think each day are the same every day, so by digging out the root motivations and replanting them, you could actually change the direction of your life. Work with a trained and certified professional coach to assist you in this journey.

A final stage is preparing rational, positive thoughts and affirmations to counter any remaining negativity. They should be specific, emotional, and expressed in the present tense. One tip is to train yourself to look for the opportunity in each situation. When you focus on opportunity, you defocus on the negativity. Other things you can try are:

- **Encourage curiosity about your mind.** Most people don't know themselves as well as they think they do. They are not aware of their thinking patterns. In psychology terms, this is called meta-cognition, where you are aware that you are thinking things and can assess the quality and usefulness of that thinking.
- **Take (and ask for) feedback graciously.** Most people avoid seeking feedback because they're afraid of what they'll hear. Once you are past the initial discomfort, you'll realize that it is a gift to get feedback because you get the opportunity to grow.
- **Don't judge yourself harshly.** Just like words matter, thoughts also matter, especially those you have about yourself. Thoughts, just like emotions, do not have an on/off switch that you can control. It is always about learning to observe and manage them. Anyone can do this. All it takes is practice.

"Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes."

— Carl Jung

7

BECOME SOLUTION-FOCUSED

Instead of focusing on the problem, try focusing on a solution. This means focusing on how to solve the problem. Developing problem-solving skills encourage your brain to be more productive, which then allows you to stay calm. Not only will it help avoid emotional hijacking, but it's a superb workplace skill.



As a byproduct, it builds confidence as you practice and tune your process when approaching a problem. Here are four basic steps in solving a problem:

- **Define the problem** – the key here is to ensure you are dealing with a real problem and not the symptoms. Do this by looking for the root cause. Tools like Cause/Effect Diagram, 5 Whys, Root Cause Analysis, and Fishbone flowchart diagrams can be helpful. Most importantly, it helps you identify the nature of the problem between process, planning, fulfillment, or communication.
- **Generate alternatives** – Getting different perspectives on possible solutions makes space for creativity, engagement, and discovery that a single mind may not come up with because not everyone will have the same view.
- **Evaluate and select alternatives** – Very few problems are simple as we live in an ever-changing, complex world. Complexity calls for working as a team to assess options and make the best possible decision that positively impacts all.
- **Implement solution** – Nothing happens, and nothing changes without execution. The good news is that following the four steps will increase confidence and adoption by your organization or colleagues.

Becoming solution-focused nourishes the brain and is one of many different ways to improve your emotional intelligence. These four simple steps above will serve you well in many situations. More comprehensive problem-solving processes exist, and we have hundreds of proven tools we have curated and are happy to share.

Please contact us [here](#) to learn more.

8

CHECK FOR UNEXAMINED BIASES

You're not always right. Maybe you don't actually have a good reason to be upset. Consider whether your thoughts and beliefs are 100% aligned with the circumstances and why they upset you. As much as we'd like to think of ourselves as open-minded, unconscious biases influence how we see things without even realizing it. Decision-making is inherently a cognitive activity – the result of thinking that could be rational or irrational. Unchecked biases are therefore barriers to the decision-making process.



Whether in the workplace or family and social environments, it is critical to understand those unconscious biases that are at play to ensure you make the best possible decision on how to act or respond appropriately. Here are three common decision-making biases that can sabotage you:

Confirmation bias - places more value on information supporting your existing beliefs, whether right or misguided.

- Instead, do this: make sure you take information from various sources, people and play devil's advocate.

Anchoring bias – is the overreliance on a single initial piece of information or experience. Once set, it shuts off other views and limits our ability to factor in new potentially relevant information.

- Instead, do this: give yourself time to reflect and don't rush to a conclusion before considering other factors.

Availability heuristic bias – is when you place more value on the first idea that comes into your head without questioning it.

- Instead, do this: adopt the practice of doubting your first impression to make room for more careful analysis.

A neuroscience-based behaviors and driving forces assessment that is validated and 100% bias-free is the best way to discover the biases and blind spots that block personal and professional growth. Contact us to learn more.

9

FOCUS ON YOUR BREATHING

Different than pausing and taking a breath, this refers to integrating helpful breathing techniques. I endearingly call it “calming your internal Godzilla.” Breathing techniques are not something you practice during heightened emotional states. They need to be practiced daily and applied every time you experience feelings of stress or anxiety. We have conditioned ourselves to ignore or brush off those situations, but they don’t go away. They accumulate. Before you know it, even something small might make you explode.



Use techniques like box-breathing or counting slowly to 10 are simple yet highly effective. Meditation breathing is another. Find the type of breathing exercise that works for you and create a daily habit of doing it. The time you need for that is 2-3 minutes. With practice, it may only take 1 minute or less.

During a strong emotional reaction, you’re focused on the thoughts going through your head that may lead you astray. It’s easy to magnify your emotional state when your focus is inward. Bring yourself back to reality by directing your attention to your breathing.

10

Develop Emotional Intelligence

Commonly referred to as EQ - emotional quotient, it is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one’s emotions and handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. EQ is considered a crucial component to the future of work, given the rising rates of loneliness, depression, and mental health concerns.



It is an essential skill for leadership to manage an increasingly complex and ever-changing world. --> continued

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Develop Emotional Intelligence - continued

Being able to stay calm in a volatile or escalated situation, resolve conflict, engage and retain teams, and bring out the best in people is a sign of a successful leader.

The benefits of a high EQ include increased team performance, improved decision-making, reduced staff turnover, increased personal well-being, decreased occupational stress, and increased leadership ability.

“To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.” - Socrates

There are three major components of EQ related to self and two related to others as follows:

- **Self-awareness** – the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, drives, and effects they have on others.
- **Self-regulation** – is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods, including suspending judgment and thinking before acting.
- **Intrinsic Motivation** – is an underlying passion for what you do that transcends the external drive for knowledge, utility, surroundings, others, power, or methodology that define your primary drivers.

Externally, EQ is a measure of what goes on between you and others.

- **Social-awareness** – is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and how your words or actions affect others.
- **Social-regulation** – is your ability to influence the emotional clarity of others through a proficiency in managing relationships and building networks.



While we will never eliminate emotional hijacking entirely, productively managing your emotions is a vital skill. Increasing your emotional intelligence is absolutely possible, and a great way to start is to test your EQ to understand the areas that need attention. A certified and trained expert in Behaviors and EQ will provide a custom development plan to maximize your efforts and achieve faster results.

It is easy to develop these skills with practice and reap the benefits of improved relationships, health, and business outcomes. Starting with these steps can put you on the right track and improve your mental health. Your confidence will increase as you master the ability to manage your emotional states instead of letting them control you.

Take the first step to gaining control over your life today!

Whether building new skills or taking your company or profession to the next level, it starts by making a conscious decision to invest in yourself to achieve it.

At MarketTecNexus, we don't believe in a one-size-fits-all model because we are all different.

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