

## EXECUTIVE VITALITY: CONTROLLING THE URGE TO BE "TRIGGER-HAPPY"

Do you have something about your work relationships that triggers you? I am talking about those times when you feel like, "Here we go again," or, "Why can't they just get this?" ... or "Do I really have to explain this again?" Your blood starts to boil and you know that if you say what you are thinking, you might seriously violate a key company or personal value. If you give into the urge to voice one of those negative or potentially derogatory reactions, you know you will regret it and wish you had been more constructive. It is time to think about some preventative measures.

For example, suppose your VP of marketing brings you a proposal that is much too similar to the last two you turned back, and about which you explained in exquisite detail from your considerable experience (or so you thought) why that approach was guaranteed not to work. You feel the rise in your blood pressure and think, "Seriously? Again? Haven't we been down this road several times before? We tried it twice. It failed twice. We know why it failed. Why is this being proposed to me again after my VP and I have had the conversation at least four times?" Yikes! The urge to just throw your hands up and throw the VP out of your office is really strong. But wait.

The best thing you can do is build some "muscle-memory" to help you:

- Not give in to the urge,
- Continue to build your good relationships, and
- Turn the situation around in a way that is healthy and motivating, not demoralizing or denigrating.

Here are some steps that will help you avoid being "trigger reactive:"

- Identify the things most likely to trigger you.
- Identify how your body feels when this occurs so you know the precursors.
- Visualize yourself "acting out" and saying what you feel—the first (and perhaps unhealthy) thing that comes to mind — "Leave my office right now and put that proposal in the trash."
- Play out the scenario in your head. Picture what the consequences of "acting out" would be — tears, fears, absence from work, wheel-spinning, losing the wrong employee(s), drop in morale, loyalty, and dedication, and worse.
- Reframe your reacting. Assume positive intent.
- Practice acting differently the next time the type of event you find frustrating occurs.

For example:

- Here is the Marketing VP with the proposal. You could delay: "I see where this is heading. Leave it with me and I will get back to you." That gives you time to not say something you will regret.

- You could gently probe and find out why the VP thought this was a good idea at this time: maybe YOU are wrong; maybe something in the environment has changed, or maybe your perceptions are wrong for another reason. Listen ... be open.
- Ask other questions to determine the underlying reason this marketing approach has been brought to you again. What is the problem? How can you help the VP see the forest, not just the trees.
- Learn your new behavior. Practice.
- Set your new behavior into action the next time.

It takes time to avoid being trigger-happy so taking the time to visualize yourself getting it right before dealing with real people is helpful.

*What causes you to behave in a way you wish you had not with colleagues or direct reports? What repertoire of new behaviors do you need to build to deal with these situations?*