Cognitive Behavioural Coaching for Anger at Work

Learn to manage emotions before they become destructive

Dorothy Spry

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Cognitive Behavioural Coaching for Anger at Work: Learn to manage emotions before they become destructive
1st edition
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ISBN 978-87-403-0737-5

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Author Biography

Dorothy Spry IABMCP is an award winning business psychologist coach and trainer. She specializes in cognitive behavioral coaching (CB coaching) to develop emotional intelligence for leaders, managers and employees in situations where their attitudes towards working with others is impairing performance, and leading to under or counter productivity.

Drawing on her research and expertise in the field of emotional intelligence training, accreditations, and coaching led Dorothy to explore more robust, psychologically researched and evidenced based forms of coaching. Coaching that would provide a coach or client with the tools and techniques in which to build authentic and sustainable emotionally intelligent behaviors.

Dorothy works both in the UK and internationally as an executive and careers coach, psychometric assessor and personal development trainer Email: dorothycbc@gmail.com

Published Management pocketbooks:-

- The Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Pocketbook (Spry 2007)
- The Psychometric Testing Pocketbook (Cripps and Spry)

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1 Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction

The relationship between employer and employee is at the heart of every business and although technology has changed the way we do our work, enabling us to automate and streamline processes in the workplace, we must not neglect the very engine that drives business, and that's the people in the organization.

Whether you are a top level CEO or entry level employee, I am sure you will agree people experience anger in many different ways and for many different reasons. What makes you angry, may only mildly irritate one of your work colleagues, and have little to no effect on another person.

By understanding more about the way people's thoughts affect their decisions and actions we are able to enhance effective interpersonal communications and in doing so increase their self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

The knock on effects for you, and for the organization as a whole equals:-

= Enhanced Performance
= Productivity
= Employee Engagement
= Employee Retention
= Well-Being

In a nutshell – A much Nicer place to Work

1.2 Overview of this e-book

The knowledge, theories, models, case studies and cognitive behavioral coaching techniques included in this e-book will help you to learn to use anger positively and manage it, so that it is constructive and not destructive. It emphasizes knowing yourself and your triggers and then using that awareness to replace unhealthy negative angry thoughts with more positive actions and balancing thoughts and beliefs that will lead to more positive interactions with others.

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While you do not want to dampen your anger completely, you do need to manage it if you are to use it creatively, for the good of your health and well-being and for those at the receiving end of your anger whether:-

- Working as part of a team
- In a team or executive board meeting
- When interacting with work colleagues, peers or direct reports
- In a customer service or client meeting capacity
- Electronic communications.

Please Note: This e-book whilst providing you with additional tools and techniques to make you *think* about what makes you angry in the workplace and the reasoning behind it. In cases where anger is 'Out of control' leading to acts of extreme abuse and violence, a deeper therapeutic intervention (beyond the CB Coaching approach) is recommended in order to explore, tease out and get to the bottom of unresolved anger issues.

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2 What is Cognitive Behavioural Coaching?

2.1 What is Cognitive Behavioural Coaching?

Cognitive Behavioural Coaching or CB Coaching as it is known brings together elements of psychology (cognitive behavioral and rational emotive behavioral therapies) with regular coaching practice.

This forms a powerful and yet surprisingly simple approach for tackling unhealthy and negative self-defeating emotions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs together with tried and tested practical and reflective techniques to help change behavior.

CB coaching involves thinking about how we *think* and *react* to situations, and about the impact thoughts and beliefs can have on a person's life.

To quote Epictetus, the Greek Stoic philosopher:

"We are disturbed not by events, but by the beliefs that we hold about them"

2.2 How does CB Coaching work?

CB Coaching will help a person to identify, examine and change unhealthy thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and then start them thinking in ways that are more rational, realistic, positive and workably effective.

This scientifically proven and systematic process using a series of reflective questioning techniques that works to raise emotional self awareness of how we think about an upsetting event, and by changing how we think about the event regulates our emotional responses in how we manage our emotions and manage the emotions of others.

2.3 CB Coaching defined

CB Coaching is a systematic coaching conversation that draws on psychological theory and practical techniques to facilitate transformational change in the achievement of personal and professional goals.

In using CB Coaching architecture to structure coaching conversations the coach asks questions that turn negative thoughts and feelings into positive ones to achieve a desired behavioral change

Dorothy Spry, 2009

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2.4 How can CB Coaching help you or your organization?

Take a look at the list below and put a *mental tick* next to each one that you observe/suffer or have to deal with in your work environment on a daily basis:

- Self-regard/confidence issues
- Assertiveness (over/under)
- Anger management issues
- Impatience (hurry up you must get the job finished)
- Attitude issues (mis-interpretations and perceptions of others)
- Communication problems (all of the above)

Frightening, isn't it? Notice I said daily and not weekly or from time to time. That's why it is essential to improve on the way an individual's thinking affects their professional and personal life.

2.5 Who can adopt CB Coaching for Anger at Work?

- Coaches looking for an additional tool for their coaching toolkits
- Individuals wishing to build their self-awareness concerning how their emotions, thoughts and feelings can lead to unhealthy actions and how they can change this.
- Managers and leaders who wish to adopt a coaching, rather than a telling style with their direct reports.

2.6 How is CB Coaching different from other coaching approaches?

I am sure you will agree that the coaching industry is flooded with various coaching models. One popular coaching model being GROW (Goals, Reality, Options and Will). GROW acts as an excellent framework enabling the person being coached to raise their awareness and take responsibility for their own goals. For many, this practical approach may be sufficient if the individual being coached is **not** experiencing any psychological or performance goal blocking interfering emotions, thoughts, feelings and actions.

This is where CB Coaching is moving the coaching industry to new level where thoughts, feelings, emotions and beliefs are questioned in a constructive and positive way, thus allowing the individual to become their own coach and provide balance both personally and professionally. After all, that's what we all strive for.
Source: Dorothy Spry Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Pocketbook

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"CB Coaching helps increase long-term and sustainable emotionally intelligent behaviour. In order for the person being coached to develop this type of behaviour and eventually to behave differently, CB Coaching first enables the individual to think differently. Dorothy Spry based this innovative approach to coaching, which is clearly explained in the Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Pocketbook, on the whole person perspective in that it combines important aspects of cognitive, emotional and social intelligence in order to effectively change behaviour in a more positive direction."

Prof. Reuven Bar-On, the person behind the concept of EQ, the author of the Bar-On EQ-i and co-editor of "Educating People to be Emotionally Intelligent"

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3 Anger, its definition, causes & effects

3.1 Definition of Anger

***Anger is a feeling of great annoyance or antagonism as the result of some real or supposed grievance; rage; wrath.* (Collins English Dictionary)**

3.2 Angry people

I am sure that you have noticed some people have a shorter fuse than others when even the smallest situation or event will trigger their hot buttons. They don't take things in their stride as easily as some, and when faced with a stressful situation, event, annoyance/or irritant they feel they do not deserve they will go overboard in their reaction to the situation more strongly than the situation actually warrants. That is when they end up saying or doing things in the heat of the moment that they may later regret saying, or acting out on.

Buddy Rydell Quote: played by Jack Nicholson in the film Anger Management

Temper's the one thing you can't get rid of, by losing it

Anger certainly is a strong emotion, its complexity being that many people experience anger in many different ways and for many different reasons. What makes one person angry may mildly irritate another. Research conducted by the Anger Research Consortium, reported that *"most people feel a little angry a few times a week and as many as a third of us feel angry on a daily basis"*.

3.3 Causes of Anger

Individuals possess complex internal psychological structures that often provoke a significantly different reaction to the same thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences about a situation or event they perceive to be a threat. This can be a big issue for conflict in the workplace springing our thoughts, beliefs, perceptions and interpretations surrounding something that happened at work into over drive.

Have you ever been in a situation where a co-worker walked right past you one morning without as much as an acknowledgement or hello? Whereas one individual will interpret the situation in a negative light with thoughts such as 'what have I done wrong' or 'I shouldn't be treated like that', 'I will sort that idiot out and ignore them from now on, another person may think that the individual in question may be having a bad day or perhaps have something on their mind. I will speak with them later.

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The **first** set of irrational reactions will foster frustration, anger and inner turmoil leading to anxiety and reduced productivity in the workplace resulting in low emotional intelligence.

The **second** set of reactions displayed a more balanced and rational approach with the individual using their emotional intelligence by *not* jumping to conclusions and labeling the other person until they had concrete evidence there was a problem. It is important to remember that we are in control of our own emotions and thoughts – not another person's. If someone has a bad attitude, you cannot control that, but work with it by managing your own emotions in a positive manner.

3.4 Emotions and Thoughts

Thoughts and emotions feed off one another. E.g., the more fearful, anxious or angry an individual becomes, the more distorted their thoughts. It makes sense, therefore, that before a client can change behaviours they have to change what is going on inside their minds – how they think because this ultimately impacts how they feel and go on to behave, driven by their emotions.
Dorothy Spry, The Cognitive Behavioural Coaching Pocketbook (2010), Management Pocketbooks.

3.5 Physical effects of Anger

The physical effects of anger are often an area that goes unchecked. Before you know it – a triggering situation or event occurs – the neural pathway steps up a gear and rage ensues. Therefore, it is important to take a closer look at just how our *thinking* and *emotions* impact on the mind body and soul because ultimately this powerful concoction can lead to e.g. heart attacks or strokes.

Examples of the unseen Physical effects of anger:

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure

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Emotions matter for rationality. In the dance of feelings and thoughts the emotional faculty guides our moment to moment decisions, working hand in hand with the rational mind, enabling or disabling thought itself. Likewise, the thinking part of the brain plays an executive role in our emotions – except in those moments when emotions surge out of control and the emotional brain runs rampant.
Emotional Intelligence – Why it can matter more than IQ, Daniel Goleman (1995)

3.6 Healthy Anger

Healthy Anger is about recognizing that anger is a normal emotion and that by paying close attention to it when it surfaces, and by making choices that allow us to express and manage anger appropriately it can motivate us to stand up for ourselves and to make positive changes in our lives and the everyday situations we face. The consequences surrounding the decisions that we make concerning how we perceive, think or feel about an upsetting event or situation we face result in a much more positive outcome in how we feel and think about ourselves as human beings – less guilty less blaming, less anxiety and less physical effects.

There are some people who always seem angry and continuously look for conflict. Walk away; the battle they are fighting is not with you, it is with themselves. Unknown

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4 Link between EQ, CB Coaching & Anger

4.1 What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the measure of a person's ability to deal with events and situations by the **intelligent understanding** and **use** of **emotions.** Intelligent understanding and use of emotions refers to an above average ability to *assess* (rationally), *understand* and *mould* the emotional behaviour of self and that of others.

This is extremely useful and practical science which once learnt and mastered can help you achieve unimaginable success rates in both your professional and personal environment. In particular during times of conflict when uncontrolled emotions presses and activates the anger button and before you know it – your feelings and thoughts are jumping all over the place. This may materialise in suppression or an expressive explosion of how your feel and think, later leading to regret about why your got angry in the first place and the consequences of getting angry.

Illustration credit: Phil Hailstone

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4.2 What are the benefits of working on your EQ?

If you have a High EQ your Emotions will be:

- Rational, balanced and healthy.
- You will make decisions from a calm and clear mind free of emotions that could potentially cause negative consequences in both your personal and professional life.

Illustration credit: Phil Hailstone

You will understand the *hidden* meaning of self-defeating emotional baggage such as

- Guilty feelings
- Blame self or others
- Fear of failure
- Low confidence and low self esteem
- Suppressed or Expressed Assertiveness
- Appropriate management of Anger
- Complaining and whining about things that don't happen
- Jumping to the wrong conclusions without using thought and the impact this may have upon others.

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4.3 Self-Awareness

You cannot develop a high level of EQ until you learn to recognize the true emotions you are feeling. There are **surface** emotions and **true** emotions. For example, imagine a colleague hurries into the office where you are seated behind the desk, and slams the door sending loose papers flying everywhere. Naturally, you are upset, and have the desire to act. Your initial emotion is anger. If acting in anger you may scream at the person, and demand restitution. But, anger is not the true emotion; it is a reactionary defense to a hostile situation.

If you are practicing self-awareness and exercising your EQ, you would behave differently. Rather than being *Reactive* – you would pause and analyze the anger. You would most likely determine that your true emotional response was fear of a possible threat. Then, you would consider your choices for action based on your relationship with the other person, and what steps the situation warrants.

By adding CB Coaching techniques into the mix you would be able to weed out the hidden connection between all of those negative emotions in yourself, that leads you to react to someone with anger or to turn your anger inwards.

Having understood the true meaning of these emotions you automatically realize their *uselessness* and can then take postive steps by discarding them which in turn acts to increase your EQ in how you go about managing your emotions and that of others.

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5 Anger & the role of Assertiveness

5.1 Clarity about Assertiveness

Anger and Assertiveness are intrinsically intertwined with individuals holding their own viewpoints of what being Assertive means to them.

For example, a leader may hold the *belief* that to be Assertive is to act ***aggressively*** in tone of voice and body language in order to put their viewpoint point across – hence adopting a *telling* or *authoritarian* approach, rather than a *coaching* culture within their organization.

By understanding the *true meaning* of what it is to be assertive helps in the development of changing ways of thinking and behaving for the good of the company and its employees well-being, therefore, avoiding a breeding ground for lack of employee engagement and ultimately an under forming organization where employees are not happy to come to work, leave, or sue the boss for being a domineering bully.

5.2 Definition:

- Assertiveness *is not* about being **aggressive**, where an angry person shouts another person down in a board or team meeting, or blows up in a fit of rage in order to get their point across and get their own way. Venting unhealthy anger does not help the situation at all – as it can make a person even angrier and cause secondary emotional and physical disturbances such as: guilt, shame, anxiety, high blood pressure, stroke or a heart attack. This is without taking into account what the individuals work colleagues are thinking and feeling about the situation i.e. Loss of respect for the offender.
- Assertiveness *is not* about **suppressing anger**. People who hold anger in to avoid confrontation are not doing themselves any favors as the unresolved anger only creates a breeding ground for bottling up emotions: sulking, seething, resentfulness or withdrawal from the situation.
- **Real Assertiveness** is about having good self-regard and putting your viewpoint across in a non-confrontational and non-judgmental way without feeling the need to blame, put others down or go into a temper tantrum. Learning to say what you feel in an assertive and non-confrontational manner and not in an emotional, angry way is essential at work – not just for harmony, but for the effective functioning of the organization as a whole.

How assertive a person is plays a crucial role in how they manage their anger. It is when a reaction is aggressive and beyond what a situation actually warrants that problems arise. Likewise, unacknowledged anger can also lead to problems with relationships, health, and well-being. Being a skilled communicator, having good ideas, and being able to approach disagreement objectively and in an *emotionally intelligent* fashion – are all more likely to win the respect of others.

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6 CB Coaching – Theories & Models

6.1 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Aaron Beck, a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist (CBT), developed the Cognitive Model which has been used very successfully within the therapeutic domain since the 1960s. Drawing on the therapeutic community's readymade database of CBT research looking at how people's thoughts drive their emotional reactions to situations or events that they may be facing in life such as: depression, anger or attitude problems has shown a complimentary overlap regarding what is happening within the organizational domain. This has led to a more user friendly term of CB Coaching now being applied within the workplace.

Aaron Beck states that:

'The interpretation of a situation, rather than the situation itself, often expressed in automatic thoughts, influences one's subsequent emotion, behavior and physiological response'.

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6.2 Chattering in the brain

Aaron Beck, observed that his patients with low moods or depression had an **internal Chattering** in the brain which prohibited them from thinking or seeing things in a rational light.

He identified the internal chattering as **negative** in nature and gave them the name: *Negative Automatic Thoughts* or NATS.

An example of an NAT is – *I must be perfect in everything I do, if not I am a failure.*

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT – *I am a failure.*

6.3 Poisonous Parrot

If we think about NATs as being similar to a poisonous parrot who sits on your shoulder repeating negative words into your ear in good old parrot fashion. It is not surprising that before long you start to believe the parrots constant criticizing and putting you down.

There goes that poisonous parrot again– Yes you are such a failure, you are so stupid, you are pathetic, a useless waste of space – you cannot do anything right can you? Failure.

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For years we listen to this internal bully who critics and repeats the same old lines. What is worst we believe the poisonous parrot and get upset which leads to a vicious circle of recurring anxiety and stress This effects how we handle ourselves and handle our relationships with others.

The **Goal** of Aaron Beck was to replace the NATS with PATS – *Positive Automatic Thoughts* by paying closer attention to how individuals *think* and was that kind of thinking – *rational* or *distorted* in nature.

6.4 Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)

A good framework used in CB Coaching in which to explore NATS and turn them into PATS is the ABCDE model developed by Albert Ellis the founding father of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT).

Similar to Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis worked from the same premise, accept instead of focusing on '*Automatic Thought's* his focus was on a person's **beliefs.**

We are disturbed not by events, but by the beliefs which we hold about them.
Epictetus Greek philosopher

Beliefs developed from a young age and which may now be outdated and yet still choose to hang around to cause havoc within people's lives.

Albert Ellis **goal** was to establish whether an individual's **beliefs** concerning how they viewed the world was through either a *rational* or *irrational* lenses.

He developed the ABCDE model which has been used successfully to capture these beliefs which act to drive Aaron Becks Automatic Thoughts.

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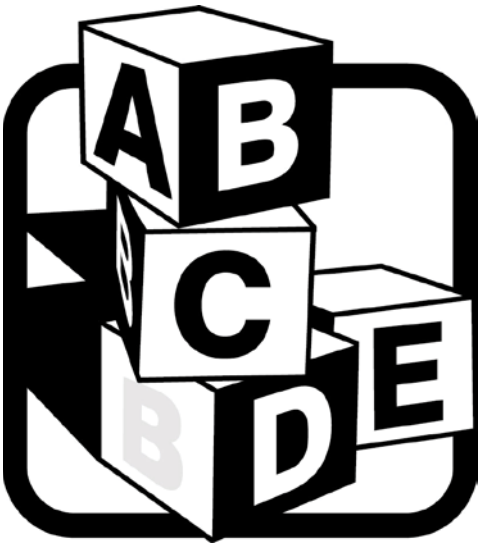
7 ABCDE Model



7.1 Stage 1: A = Activating Event or Situation that you face

Stage 1 involves a triggering event or situation and acknowledging the negative thoughts and emotions involved with the event. It is important to look closely at the automatic thoughts – those thoughts that have an immediate reaction to an experience. A big part of CB Coaching is to keep a daily record of the thoughts and feelings associated with the activating event by writing and breaking each part down and in detail.

7.2 Case Study

Tom's unrealistically high expectations for himself and for others was causing him stress, leading him to display anger towards work colleagues and damaging his interpersonal relationship with them. His challenge was to change from a telling approach to one of listening and to ask questions and to stay calm instead of immediately giving his opinion and taking control in a reactive situation by name calling and putting his work colleagues down.

Tom's Goal: – To work on his interpersonal relationship with his team members.

The CB Coach asked Tom to notice when he experienced an EXTREME emotional reaction.

He was asked to answer the following sequence of questions and write his responses in a record journal.

Have a go yourself.

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Question 1: Notice when you experience an *extreme* emotional reaction that you feel frustrated, upset and angry about. It is important to **be specific.**

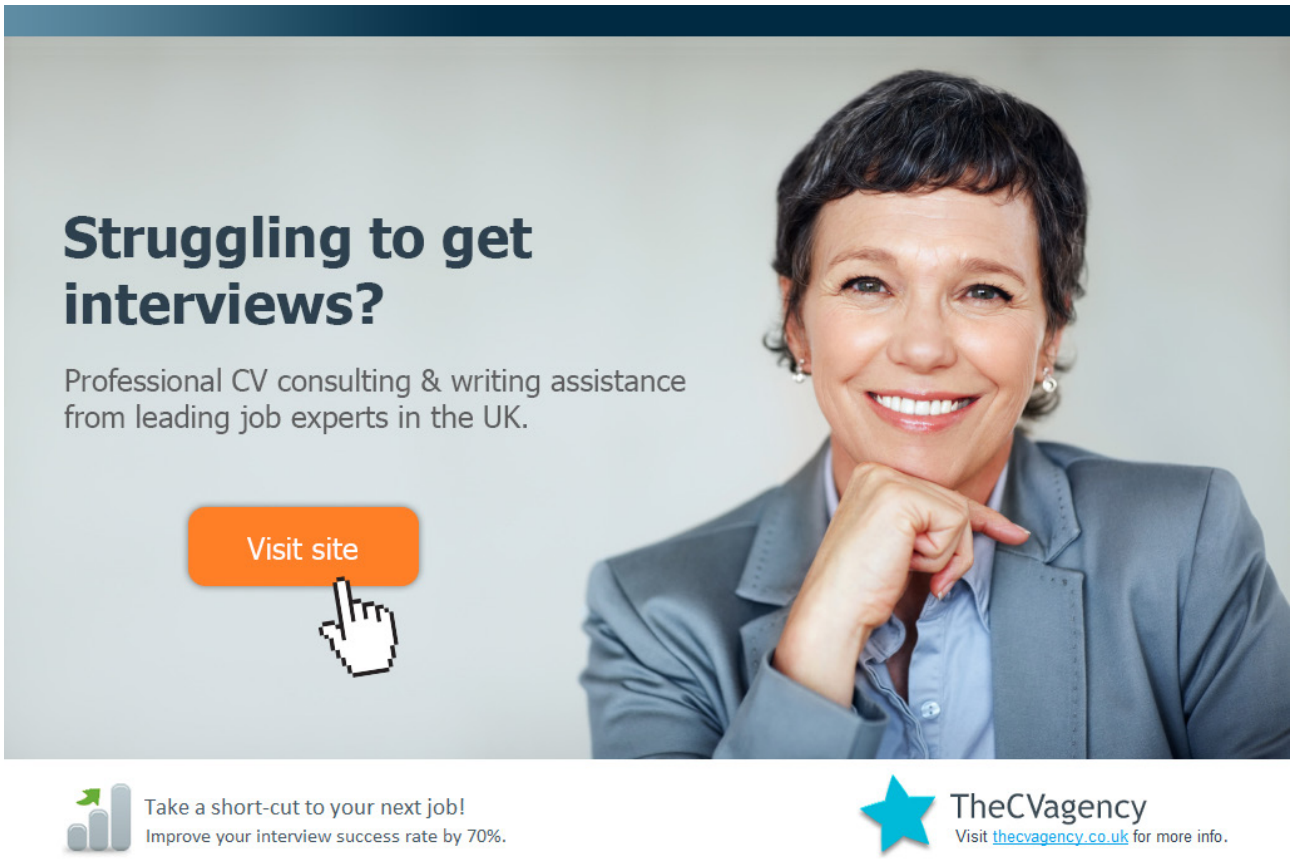
A = ACTIVATING EVENT/SITUATION. What was the upsetting *situation,* known as the activating event or trigger?

Tom – ***I lashed out at a direct report***

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION the actual event leading to the feelings of distress.

I told a direct report to do a job and he did not do the job properly. He just did not listen to my instructions. I really cannot trust him or certain team members to do anything right, the way I want it to be done anyway.

This is why I get stressed and lose my temper even over small things now.



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Question 2: Now write down under A using the guidance below – break down what your *feelings* were.

HOW DID YOU **FEEL?** What were your **EMOTIONS?**

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES E.g. angry, hot or cold thoughts, upset, anxious, fearful, ashamed, embarrassed, insulted, defensiveness, like crying?

Hot thoughts, rage

Question 3: Now write down using the guidance below – break down what you were *thinking* and write under A.

WHAT DID YOU **THINK?** What were the automatic thought(s) that preceded the emotion(s): What was going through your mind before you started to feel this way? E.g.: *I should not be spoken to in this way, I feel useless.*

How dare they, they must do as they are told

Having completed part A – The activating event/trigger, we now move straight to C of the ABCDE framework – the Consequences.

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7.3 Stage 3: C = Consequences

Question 4: This stage involved Tom writing down and describing both the physiological and external responses to the perceived threat.

Here we are looking for the consequences of the powerful combination of thoughts and emotions you were feeling?

Write down under C – What were the **PHYSIOLOGICAL** responses experienced? For example: sweaty hands, heart racing, red mist, raised heartbeat.

Heart racing, red mist, sweaty hands

Write down under C – What where the **BEHAVIOURAL** responses experienced?
For example – you storm out of the room, start shouting, walk away, slam doors, bang the table.

Shouts, bangs table

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7.4 Stage 2: B = Beliefs

Beliefs are formed throughout a person's life, from childhood onwards, and need to be analyzed in order to change those beliefs that cause negative thoughts and actions. It is important to recognize that beliefs trigger negative automatic thoughts, and not the actual occurring activating event or situation. This is significant because thoughts ultimately determine the actions that are taken.

Toms Belief – **I must be perfect in everything I do, if not I am a failure**

This triggered the Negative *Automatic thought (NAT)* – **I am a failure**

Throughout Tom's school years he was expected to be a straight A student If he received a grade less than an A – this was perceived by his high achieving parents as failure – hence making him feel a failure. His perfectionist beliefs and thoughts instigated in childhood where carried with him into his personal and professional life and formed a powerful concoction for stress on a big scale.

Holding such a rigid belief based on perfectionist demands is bound to put stress on him because his belief is *unrealistic* – as no one is perfect.

7.5 A-B Connection

The beliefs that we hold can have a dramatic impact in our progression towards making positive and successful cognitive behavioral changes. By raising Toms self-awareness examining and challenging the beliefs held about uncomfortable events – it became apparent that it was not in fact the A-activating event that led to C = consequences – but the B – beliefs held about them

7.6 Stage 4: D = Dispute the beliefs that trigger the NATS

At this stage of the ABCDE model *thoughts* and *beliefs* held are disputed to discern if they are rational or irrational. David Burn's 1980s research identified 10 unhelpful thinking styles called cognitions *distortions* that individuals adopt when perceiving a situation or activating event.

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7.7 Cognitive Distortions

Question 5: Have a look at the following 10 cognitive distortions and under D of your record journal, start *Disputing* your reasoning behind your activating event or situation.

Ask yourself – are you adopting any of these you described in Stage 1 under A – activating event/ situation which triggered your anger.

1. **Black and White Thinking** *Example:*
   - If I am not perfect, I have failed**.**
   - I will get this right, or not at all

2. **Over-Generalizing** *Example:*
   - Everything is always rubbish
   - Nothing good ever happens

3. **Mental Filter** *Example:*
   - Only paying attention to certain types of evidence
   - What went wrong/failures but not seeing what went right – the successes?

4. **Disqualifying the positive.** This is another type of mental filter – You discount the good thing that have happened or the good things you have done or achieved. *Example:*
   - That does not count.
   - The trainer who receives 18 positives feedbacks from workshops participates, but only notices the two negatives

5. **Jumping to the wrong conclusions**. There are two types of jumping to conclusions. *Example:*

   Mind reading imagining you know what others are thinking without any actual evidence to support your thinking 2 plus 2 = 5

   Fortune telling predicting the future without any hard facts to support your thinking. Just because an individual assumes something, does that mean it is right? Search for hard facts to support the assumption.

6. **Labelling, name calling (self, others)** this cognitive distortion is about assigning labels to ourselves and other people. *Example:*
   - I'm a loser
   - I am completely useless
   - They are idiots

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7. **Emotional Reasoning** – I feel it, so it must be true, feelings are treated as facts. Assuming that because we feel a certain way then what we think must be true. *Example:*
   - I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot
   - I feel stupid and boring, so I must be stupid and boring

8. **"Must" statements** Using critical words like – must statements places a great deal of stress on an individual when a demand is not met. Using a word like must is fuelled with Imperatives, fixed ideas, inflexibility about how you or others should behave. *Example:*
   - People must always be polite
   - I should not get angry – people should be nice to me all the time
   - I must always be on time
   - I must always be perfect at everything I do

Using 'must' statements leads to anguish when the rule or demand is not met

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9. **Magnification (castrophising)** this unhelpful distortion is about blowing things out of proportion to make the situation seem worst then it really appears. *Example:*
   - Everything will end in disaster
   - This is awful, I will make a complete fool of myself giving the presentation

10. **Personalization & Blame** Blaming yourself. Taking responsibility for something that was not your fault or blaming others for something that was your fault. *Example*
    - My way or no way
    - It is all *your* fault
    - It is all *my* fault

Is that negative poisonous parrot operating again?

If so, it is important to begin to start **questioning** your negative automatic thoughts and beliefs and to dispute them to establish whether this kind of thinking is of a *rational* or *irrational* nature.

7.8 Using Socratic Questions

In order to start disputing your current thinking style a questioning process is introduced called Socratic questioning.

Socratic questioning originates from the Greek philosopher Socrates and involves asking a series of questions in order to begin to explore and dispute the reality of your Activating Anger Trigger rather than a distorted version of it.

It works towards:

- Encouraging individuals to look at the evidence for their unhelpful thoughts and beliefs.
- Guides you to look for the evidence for any assumptions made and to base this on facts
- Encourages a ***rational***, rather than irrational thinking approach

7.9 Examples of Socratic Questions

- Are my angry thoughts and actions demanding Approval? Perfection? Control?
- Are you using unhelpful thinking styles, e.g. all or nothing thinking or labelling?
- Am I taking an extreme view?
- Am I looking at things through rose tinted glasses? Is that mental filter in operation?
- Am I blowing things out of proportion? Magnifying the situation to look bigger than it actually is?
- Just how important is this really? How important will it be in six months' time?

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- Is this fact based on evidence or an opinion? Am I adopting mind reading or fortune telling and blowing the situation out of proportion than what it really warrants?
- Am I exaggerating or distorting the situation? – Where is the evidence?
- Am I communicating in the right manner with my work colleague – where is the evidence?
- Am I taking this personally?
- Am I spending time ruminating?
- What is the worst that can happen?
- Is it really so bad, or am I seeing things in black and white?
- Am I laying blame on others? Am I taking a – they are wrong and I am right attitude? – black and white thinking with no room for shades of grey or middle ground to work with.
- Is there another way of looking at this at situation?
- What would I think about someone else in this situation?
- What would a caring friend say about the situation?
- Am I jumping to conclusion about what this person meant
- Am I misreading the situation? Is it possible they did not mean this?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others and minimizing the positives? How would someone else see it? – what is the bigger picture
- What is a kind and constructive way to think about how I can improve this situation?
- What other explanations are there for this situation?
- What other way is there to think about this situation?

Question 6: Upon reflection do you feel you assessed and handled A = your activating event or situation correctly?

Going back to your record journal start disputing (D) the activating anger trigger using Socratic questions – Ask yourself?

Is this kind of thinking really valid? Is it really true? Where is the evidence for this kind of thinking?

Am I seeing things in a realistic light?

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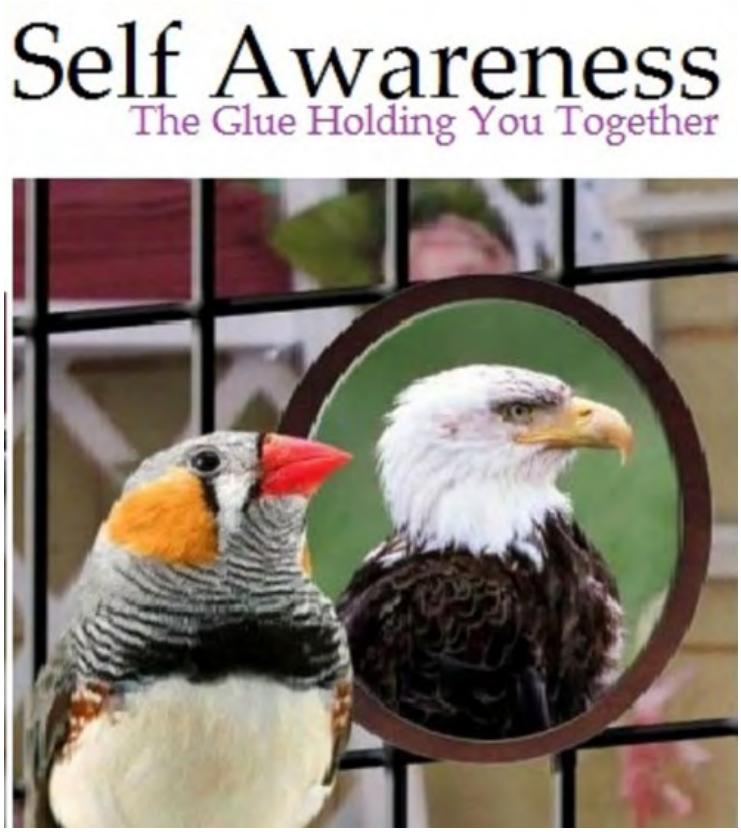

7.10 Case Study (Tom continued)

The CB Coach worked with Tom to start disputing his unhelpful cognitive distortions when describing his team members:

- Paul is an idiot and I have told him so, he never does anything right in my eyes – loser
- Some team members do not come up to my standards. They must do it my way or it won't work.
- I cannot trust certain team members to do anything right, the way I want it to be done This is why I get stressed and lose my temper even over small things now.

Tom, adopted the following unhelpful thinking styles which was only adding to the interpersonal issues within the team:

- *Must statements* – based on his own extreme and rigid standards of perfection.
- *Labelling* – 'Paul is an idiot'
- *Filtering* – only commenting on the negative aspects of his team member's performance and ignoring any positives.

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Tom self-awareness was raised concerning the thinking style he was adopting which was impacting his team and his credibility as a manager. Tom together with his CB coach drew up a plan of action for him which included the following:-

Action Plan:

- Look at his reactions to and judgments of particular incidents
- Improve his impulse control (impatience/anger) triggers linked to his thoughts and beliefs
- Improve his listening by social awareness and training in interpersonal skills
- Develop better strategies to manage his own emotions and those of his colleagues, including appropriate assertiveness training
- Understand how his inflexibility and rigid demands for others to meet his standards led to his behavior

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8 Stage 5: E = Effect of Dispute

In this final stage, beliefs that have been disputed and determined as irrational are exchanged for beliefs that are rational. Modifying and replacing negative beliefs that cause negative thoughts is necessary to reframe an individual's thinking for the future.

8.1 Positive Self-Talk

The research conducted into positive self-talk has provided strong evidence for encouraging the effective transfer of learning to take place when attempting to break the vicious cycle of negative self-talk and point the focus on **positive** self-talk.

The goal is to make time in your life to catch yourself if you feel the recurring negative thoughts and irrational thinking creeping up on you. If we go back to the example used of the poisonous parrot who constantly sits on your shoulder repeating negative thoughts. They will not give up easily, so it is important to work on repeating your positive self-talk.

8.2 Case Study (Tom continued)

Toms challenge was to adapt his behavior from a telling approach to stay calm instead of immediately giving his opinion and taking control. An excellent tool to use which encourages regular practice is the *Balancing Thoughts Sheet.*

The Goal is to work on putting together supportive positive balancing thoughts which would counter balance the negative thoughts. This process acts to reinforce your energising positive self-talk and helps to embed the new ways of thinking. Eventually the poisonous parrot will give up when they know you are not listening anymore.

Tom was asked to write in the:

Left-hand column, a negative thought or situation that they are dealing with at present.

Right-hand column they were asked to write down an alternative statement that balances the negative one by moderating it in a realistic manner or by giving it a simple positive spin at the end.

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TOMS BALANCING THOUGHTS SHEET

Negative thought/belief		**Positive balancing statement**
It was deliberate	CHANGE TO →	I don't know exactly why this happened I will find out more before I jump to conclusions
I only see what they have done wrong	CHANGE TO →	I notice both the positives and negatives.
I must challenge my team	CHANGE TO →	I will fully discuss my team's ideas
I am right and she is definitely wrong	CHANGE TO →	I can listen to the other team member's point of view

The CB Coach worked with Tom to get into the habit of consciously completing the ABCDE exercises relevant to his own personal activating event or situation. These measures had helped him to learn to stop and notice how his thoughts were making him feel and react in an activating event or situation

He was asked to – refer to, practice and recite (in positive parrot fashion) the supportive and energising positive balancing thoughts statement which would counter balance the nagging self-defeating thoughts. This helped him to focus his thoughts and create a:

- Positive frame of mind
- Feel more in control
- Less anxious
- Stressed
- Prone to anger outbursts

Have a go yourself at creating a balancing thoughts sheet. It takes practice – but the effort is well worth achieving. Recording your *old* & *new* thoughts & beliefs and turning the consequences into positive ones will allow time for reflection and analysis and putting together a more balanced and rational viewpoint – one that is in perspective and will bring with it respect of yourself and from those you work with. This also overflows into your home life in how you handle situations there.

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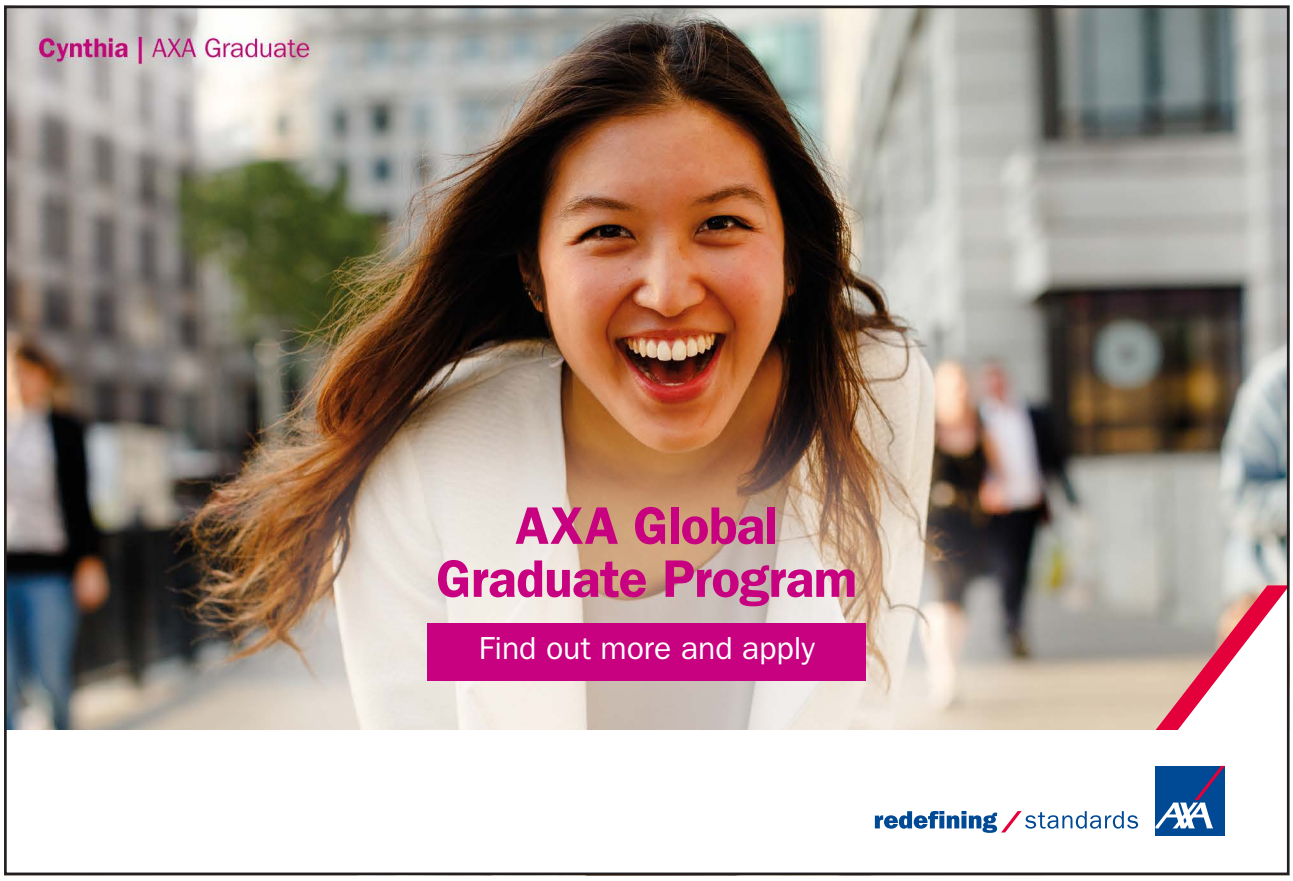
9 Practice makes perfect

9.1 Keeping a record Journal

There is no getting away from it that mindful practice of the CB Coaching techniques is an integral part of successful behavior changes in how you *think* and go on to *behave* in a triggering event or situation. After all, for years you may have listened to the negative and poisonous parrot sitting on your shoulder telling you – what a loser you are, or you cannot do anything right can you? Changing beliefs, thought patterns and actions does not occur over night. But once the new, positive beliefs and thoughts have been identified, they can be written down and referenced as often as necessary until they become automatic thoughts.

By investing the time to complete the ABCDE exercises demonstrates a strong motivation to makes positive changes regarding your responses to anger.

Long established habits like having a short temper or being a perfectionist, are deeply engrained. In such cases, the individual needs to work both at ***unlearning*** *the old, automatic habit and at* ***replacing*** *it with the new improved one.* Daniel Goleman. Why Emotional Intelligence can matter more than IQ



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9.2 Become your own Coach

On a positive spin, the good thing about CB Coaching is that once a CB coach has worked with you and you have learnt and mastered the techniques and practiced the ABCDE framework then you can begin to start to self-coach yourself without the need of a coach in moments of low EQ.

9.3 Case Study (Tom continued)

The CB Coach worked with Tom to get into the habit of consciously completing the ABCDE exercises relevant to his own personal activating event or situation. These measures had helped him to learn to stop and notice how his thoughts were making him feel and react in an activating event or situation.

Toms CB Coach worked with him on his developmental areas by practicing the following exercises:

9.4 Visualization exercise

Visualization exercises are a powerful way to keep focused. These are the steps:

- Sit in a chair and repeat the positive list from your balancing thoughts sheet.
- Mentally rehearse it
- Visualize what you will be able to see, e.g. the meeting room, the faces of your team.
- Imagine the conversation, the words used; hear yourself saying them
- Imagine now how you are feeling as the relationships improve and members of your team begin to trust you more
- Imagine now how much more confident your team members are becoming
- Think what the long-term feeling would be

Source: Cognitive Behavioral Coaching pocketbook Dorothy Spry

A good reminder is to stick your new beliefs and thoughts on the fridge – or anywhere that you feel they will be seen by you as a constant reminder towards *thinking differently.*

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Illustration credit: Phil Hailstone

9.5 Relaxation exercises using Colours

This is an exercise you can try which involves visualizing colours in moments when you are feeling stressed out.

Take a deep breathe **in**

Breathe **out** *slowly the colour* red *Relax the muscles in your face, mouth and jaws*

Breathe **in** the colour blue for ***Calm***

Breathe ***out*** *slowly the colour* red *Relax the muscles of your shoulders, arms and hands*

Breathe **in** the color green for **Balance**

Practice this exercise for a few seconds every day. You will find without realizing it that your muscles have tensed up.

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9.6 Role Play

An excellent way for preparing Tom for his activating events and situations was by using role play. For example: Tom's CB Coach worked with him raising his self-awareness concerning the body language he was using (facial expressions) and to be mindful of using the correct tone of voice in order that he could put his point across in a non-confrontational way without indulging in blaming, judging or issuing must statements.

9.7 Listening skills

Can you think of examples where someone has talked over you, or likes to hear the sound of their own voice? Being a good listening as well as a talker is a crucial skill to have and can make or break a manager or indeed a CEO. Developing this skill encourages openness and co-operation because the other person knows they have been heard. It focuses on the emotional impact on the person feeling upset rather than on blaming and judging the other person you are in conflict with. This skill involves developing empathy – a tough call for some people, but with mindful practice can be achieved.

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Research has shown empathy as being one of the top key skills to develop if a CEO or Manager does not want to run out of steam and off the railway tracks by losing their job.

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Tom was guided by his CB Coach to learn to start listening to the words, tone in voice and body language of the work colleagues he was interacting with. To practice summarizing not in 'parrot fashion' what they have said without forcing your own approach into the mix. This practice helps to put you into the other person shoes and to start to build respect – because the person feels they have been heard. Shouting order at someone causes anxiousness and limits the ability of information that is being taking in as was happening within Tom's case.

> ***When you speak to me in this tone of voice or lose your temper with me and shout, it becomes hard to listen to your message.*** Unknown and fearful employee

9.8 Morning Mindfulness exercise

Have you ever heard the saying – **Oh, you are like a bear with a sore head- did you get out of the wrong side of the bed this morning?**

Practicing morning mindfulness is about taking the time to *gather* your thoughts, feelings and emotions so they are working in unison for you and not against.

In Tom's case, it was about being mindful of how he would *react* and *act* with his work colleagues so they would respect him and he would also respect himself.

Illustration credit: Phil Hailstone

It is important to find exercises that suit you – one shoe does not fit all. Some people gather their thoughts for the day ahead by running, going to the gym, walking the dog – the list goes on – the key is to try out what works for you and helps with the stresses that activate the anger triggers.

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Conclusion

The ABCDE Model of coaching is a great tool to use in the workplace to assist in developing higher emotional intelligence levels in employees. As a result of systematic CB Coaching, employees experiencing instances of low emotional intelligence leading to anger can be guided to have healthy automatic thoughts that will equip them to make wise decisions and produce positive consequences. How we respond to anger is entirely up to us. If responses to anger are quick and heated it is a matter of relearning how to *stop* and *think* in order to make more rational choices. This should pose questions to the employee to encourage them to self-analyze their tardiness and arrive at their own achievable solution to the problem.

The benefits of an emotionally healthy employee to a company goes beyond reducing stress at the office, it also develops self-confident individuals who teach what they have learned to others. Just as having a bad apple will spoil the bunch, having emotionally intelligent employees who use their emotions *intelligently* to handle conflicts – will spread success throughout the whole organization.

Outcome: greater well-being, heightened respect, likeability and consistency in how they communicate with others across the board.

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