

FIND YOUR PEACE



Your guide to creating a life of
mindfulness and stress resilience

Week 4: Power of Choice

To harness the power of choice, it will take a bit of introspection on your part to analyze your own reactions.

One of the difficult aspects of doing this is that by the time you are an adult, your responses to external events have become unconscious psychological reflexes. It's not like you make a decision to lash out when someone touches a nerve with you. Those reactions have become pre-programmed through your lifetime.

How do you let go of automatic reflexes?

Basically you have to break the old reflexes and reform new ones. Here's the process:

1. After you have reacted

- When you realize that you have reacted to a situation without thinking first, remind yourself that this is exactly the reaction you want to break. Each time this happens, gently correct yourself.
- Over time, you will begin to recognize the situation coming on before the reaction happens. This will be huge progress.

2. Before you have reacted

- There will come a time when you realize you are in a stressful situation that would normally elicit your psychological reflex. When this happens, you will want to react as you normally do. But stop and decide to let that moment pass. Let. It. Go.
- After it has passed for ten seconds, one minute, or ten minutes, make a decision as to how you should best react.

Every time you do this, you strengthen your brain's new reflex and weaken the old one.

ASSESS YOURSELF

Are you in control of your own actions?

Take a moment to think about the situations most likely to make you react without thinking. It could be a person, a certain situation, or even a word that is used.

How often do you find yourself having to apologize for reacting to certain situations? How often do you find yourself angry or upset even if you did not express that feeling?

Understanding your own behavioral patterns is key to creating greater control over your responses to them.



MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Your goal is progress. Not perfection.

Your goal is to react negatively less often than you normally would. If you “practice the pause”, this decreases the number of times you react without thinking.

Your success is about progress. It is about being better at controlling negative reactions. You will never be perfect. None of us will. Don't be hard on yourself if you find that you don't get it right all the time, or if you find that you have a hard time breaking your existing reflexes.

You're doing something incredibly fundamental. So give yourself time to let your practice penetrate.



Two Levels

Let's say that a situation occurs that happens to be a trigger point for you. When this happens there are two levels of response at play.

1. External reaction. This is the action you take, such as yelling at the traffic, responding to a comment with snark and sarcasm, or even being physical in some manner.
2. Internal reaction. This is actually what elicits the external reaction in the first place. It is the feeling you have that is caused by whatever pushed your button.

Changing your external reaction to events is a matter of controlling what you do with the feelings. A great way

to do this is to practice the pause. Wait a few seconds before reacting, and you will be better able to choose your own reaction to that feeling, instead of it being chosen for you.

Changing the internal reaction to your push-button issues is a far deeper process. Think about how fundamental this would be if you could not only control your internal reactions but remove them altogether!

This week's session is focused on your external actions and does not address the more fundamental issue of where they come from in the first place. We will get to that facet in the next session.

