Never Cry At Work Again!
How to stay cool, calm and collected in every negotiation

If you’re reacting with emotion instead of intention, it’s almost impossible to negotiate an outcome that you’ll be happy with.
Here’s how to regain control of your emotions and feel confident to...
• Ask for what you want.
• Understand what the other person wants.
• Come up with agreements that work for both of you.

By Melissa Hereford, founder of Negotiate With Confidence

I teach ambitious, authentic women to ask for more and build stronger relationships at work.

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Deb was delivering her quarterly report to the management team. She was halfway through the numbers part, and the news was mediocre. She was trying out a new sales enablement plan, where her team was looking for spots in the pipeline where sales seemed to be dropping off, then training the sales people on skills that would address the common issues for that part of the sales process. She’d told the team in her last quarterly report that it would take two to three quarters to see the results. But now a manager raised his objection: this isn’t working. We need to try something else. Heads were nodding and Deb got that sinking feeling. The guys were going to overrule her with their fast moving, action-oriented approach. Once again her measured approach was going to be thrown out and she was just sick of it.

Deb took a deep breath. She never got used to feeling as if she’d failed. The voice in her head was whispering that her ideas never worked, even when she knew that they’d never been given a chance to work. As her face turned red and her voice started to shake, she could feel her voice fade away.

How do you respond?
Deb gets quiet. She can’t find her voice when she’s triggered like this. Later she regrets not speaking up...what could she have said?
Sam wants a raise. She’s gotten three great performance reviews and made an appointment with her boss to talk about what she needs to do to get that salary increase.

Sam walks into her boss’s office feeling confident. She’s got all of her performance reviews printed out so she can easily refer to them, including her self-assessment.

When she sits down, her boss surprises her. She says, “Sam, I read your performance review. It was very confident. In fact, I thought it was a little too confident. I understand that you want to appear confident at work, but don’t you think it’s a little much to give yourself almost perfect marks on a performance review?” She then went on to tell Sam that some managers had complained that Sam talked too much, took too long to get to the point, and asked too many questions.

Sam took a deep breath. She never expected this. She was completely blindsided and confused. She was doing great work, always met her deadlines, always came in under budget and got raving thank you emails from customers. She thought, “They want me to be confident but not that confident! They want to keep me small.”

How do you respond?
Sam gets mad. She’s insulted and tells her boss that maybe this isn’t the right place for her. Later she regrets appearing emotional....what could she have said?
Three women, three emotional reactions

Nicki is in the weekly project team meeting. There are two women on the team and ten men. Every week Nicki goes into these meetings determined to speak up and share her ideas, but she feels intimidated.

When she does get the courage to share an idea, she often starts it with, “OK, I know you guys think I’m crazy, but...” and then kicks herself for not being confident.

She watches the men in the room just shout out every idea that comes into their heads and wishes she could follow their lead. But every time she starts to share, she feels like they’re just going to laugh at her or ignore her. When she finally gets up the nerve to talk, one of the guys talks over her.

Nicki took a deep breath. She can’t get used to the idea that the loudest person in the room wins. The competitive energy is too intimidating for her, but she berates herself for not just getting over it and contributing more. And yet every week goes by without any progress. She’s clearly stuck in a rut.

How do you respond?
Nicki gets quiet. She doesn’t fight for her right to talk. Later she complains to her friends that the guys talk over her, that she can’t get a word in edgewise....and when she does speak up they mostly ignore her. What could she have said?
Stop Reacting with emotion. Start Responding with intention.

Every day you face situations like this at work and at home where you react in ways you regret.
I do it too.
We all do.
The toughest part of these situations is that we don’t talk to one another about it!
When we do talk about it, we’re usually whining about how we were treated or venting to our friends about what happened... without having any way to do things differently.
To admit that we play a part in these scenarios is the first step to stop reacting with emotion and start responding with intention.
If you’re ready to stop complaining about how these things are driving you crazy, then read on.
If you want more to be confident and connected in your conversations, it’s time to do things differently.

“If you own this story, you get to write the ending.” - Brene Brown

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What are emotional triggers?

When something happens in a conversation that feels like a threat, our body naturally responds. This threat triggers you, prompting a physical and/or emotional response in your body. It’s ancient genetic programming that’s designed to keep you safe.

When we were cave dwellers, a trigger helped us recognize danger and deliver extra adrenaline to our bodies to help us run away or stand up to fight.

Imagine this in your office and meeting rooms.

The threat feels real, and your body responds in the same ways, preparing you to stay safe. Although safety today is keeping your job: being able to feed your family and pay your bills.

Often our triggers are related to the way we felt when we were children, so they go back to a deep part of our psychology. We are often triggered when we feel disrespected or not understood, ignored or not heard, dismissed or not valued, not included or not safe.

Trigger responses: Fight, Flight or Freeze
We speak different languages

Deb, Sam, and Nicki are experiencing common emotional triggers. Sometimes you know it’s coming, but often you don’t. Even when you can plan a response, you don’t know what to say that will keep you connected in the conversation rather than drive a wedge between you.

And the world is getting smaller. It’s no longer conversations between men and women that are so hard, it’s also conversational style differences based on age, class, education level, sexual orientation, geography, religion…and any number of other things that make us who we are. We are, quite literally, speaking different languages.

When Nicki spoke up in her meeting, the guys in the room weren’t thinking about her and how to talk over her. They speak a different language, one which they talk at the same time or talk over one another.

It’s not their job to be sure Nicki is heard or change the way they interact in order to be sure they’re hearing the quiet people in the room.

You are responsible for your responses.

It’s up to Nicki to tame her trigger and speak up in a different way. Not as a person who compromises who she is by talking louder than the guys, but one who can claim her confidence to show up in a way that is calm and clear.
The power of our tribe: why it hurts

These dynamics leave us feeling left out of our tribe at work. We are genetically designed to operate at our peak when we are working and living in tribes. When we evolved from our cave dwelling ancestors, our survival depended on tribal life for food, warmth, and basic functioning as a species. Once cast out of this tribe, we were unable to survive for long. These genetic dependencies have not left our very basic natures just because we can buy our food at the grocery store and take our children to childcare centers.

Our emotional well-being is also dependent on this tribal inclusion. When we are on the outside looking in, we feel lonely and apart from others. Imagine not just your work life, but also the belonging you feel in your yoga or spin class, your place of religious worship, your political affiliation, your child’s school, any place you join or look to for companionship and conversation. The need to fit in, to be accepted by your tribe is strong.

An Amazon Original that captures this time for women is Good Girls Revolt. Loved it!

Imagine now the modern corporate workplace, originally created by men and for men. Women started joining the corporate workforce in greater numbers in the 1960s, with the Civil Rights Movement, in care-taking jobs such as secretaries, assistants, researchers, teachers, nurses, etc. Jobs that tolerated and encouraged our collaborative natures. As we moved into leadership roles, roles still primarily filled by men, the gender communication style gaps became bigger and we find ourselves rising in the ranks but on the outside of that tribe.

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Ways we cope

When asked about how they’ve found ways into the tribe, women I’ve worked with say that they adopt the habits of the dominant group by mirroring (or imitating):

- If the tribe talks fast, they change the speed of their speech, the cadence, and the words they use.
- If the tribe curses, they curse.
- If the tribe drinks after work, they follow suit.
- If the tribe works 80 hours a week, they do the same, missing family functions because they don’t want to draw attention to themselves as “other.”

Outsider. Outside the tribe.
But this is exhausting.
If you pretend to be someone you’re not, if you adopt the behaviors of others, it wears you down.

Mirroring requires that someone else go first.

In her bestseller *Thrive*, Arianna Huffington writes about the corporate ladder that demands we act in ways that drive burnout and disengagement.
Disengagement often starts with these coping mechanisms we’ve adopted to fit into the tribe but continues as we play the part over and over again, day after day with no end in sight.
Without the skills to change, you’re cast in this role. It may feel like you are a child star trying to take on a new role but always being typecast.
What can you do about it?

When your confidence is low, you feel diminished, disrespected, and disconnected. You walk out of these meetings feeling as if you lost control, lost respect, and lost the fight. Over time, you lose the motivation to continue.

In each of these situations and many more, you want to know what you can do differently before you lose hope or become completely disconnected from caring. Because once you stop caring, it’s hard to get your work done. And then it’s a short leap out the door. Leaving a work or home relationship because of conversations is running away from them instead of working on them. And when you run away from them, they follow you. You will likely have the same challenges in a new job or a new relationship until you learn how to change the way you react.

Stop your pattern, bring confidence and connection back to your job.

Although there’s not a silver bullet that will solve all your problems all the time, you can use these skills to help you feel more confident in redirecting conversations that go off track, be seen as a compelling leader or contributor, and be more connected to your coworkers, your boss, and your family.
Secret weapons to tame your emotional triggers

When you get emotionally triggered, you typically go into one of three modes:

**Fight:** you get angry and say things you regret, or you get defensive and over-explain things.

**Flight:** you get quiet and stop contributing.

**Freeze:** you are frozen, unable to fight or run away, so surprised that you are speechless.

All of these three responses will have consequences later.

If you get angry, as Sam did, you may regret it. Not only because you said things you regret, but also because you lost your cool. These moments come back to haunt us in performance reviews when we hear those dreaded critiques that we are “too emotional.” In any of these responses, you may feel as if you made the wrong choice. Our tendency is to replay the situation in our head, over and over, stopping at the place where everything went wrong. We pick it apart, frame by frame, blaming ourselves and feeling like failures.

It doesn’t matter how many times you replay it, the next time this happens, the outcome will be similar unless you learn the skills to respond vs. react.

It won’t be easy.

Let’s follow the advice of firefighters: When you are ON FIRE (triggered), you STOP, DROP, and ROLL.
STOP your emotional trigger

Instead of reacting as you normally would, make a choice to STOP so that you can respond with intention. Start by identifying your triggers. If you can’t identify when you are triggered, it will be really hard to change your reaction.

Recognize your physical reactions.

Some people flush, get a flood of adrenaline, feel a stomach cramp, get sweaty or cry. Let’s be real and admit that this is VERY HARD to do when you first decide to take it on. Take a deep breath. Say “hello” to your fear….just see it. Many people I work with say that actually saying in your mind, “Hey, Fear, I see you and you can go now…I’ve totally got this under control,” works.

I have a very strong emotional trigger when I think I should have done something but haven’t had time to do it, or when I don’t know something that I think I should know. Shame fills my stomach with adrenaline. I feel it.

When a co-worker says, “Do you have that white paper yet?” and it’s not quite done, I can feel that shame take over my body. If I don’t recognize it, I might react by snapping, “It’s not due until tomorrow.”

I can choose to respond instead by recognizing that shame and telling it to quiet down then respond to my co-worker with a friendly, “I’d be happy to email that to you when it’s done.”

“Hey, Fear, I see you and you can go now…I’ve totally got this under control.”
Let’s look at how Deb, Nicki, and Sam are emotionally triggered.

**Deb** was meeting with her boss about a project that was due in two weeks. She had emailed him a few ideas about how to streamline the process, but her boss hadn’t responded. She felt a little worried going into the meeting that he hadn’t responded to her ideas because he thought they weren’t any good. Deb’s internal negative self-talk was making her doubt the validity of her ideas. She may start this meeting with, “Hi, I’m sorry to bother you but…”

**Triggered by feeling ignored.**

**Nicki** was presenting to a room of her peers and a few managers. She had put a lot of time into the presentation, practicing and rechecking her facts. Many of the people in the room were checking their phones or whispering to one another.

One of the managers was nodding off. Her mind was reeling with self-doubt and she stammered in her presentation.

**Triggered by feeling disrespected, ignored, or not valued.**
Sam was the only woman in the room, which was no big deal. She was used to it. The team decided on a course of action that she disagreed with. She knew the team was going for the quick fix and the solution wouldn’t work, so she spoke up.

As she was walking through a different idea, another team member said, “Can you just get to the point? You’ve been going on and on for five minutes.” She stammered as she remembered that her feedback on her performance review was that she talked too much and needed to get to the point faster.

Triggered by feeling unheard, disrespected, and not included.

How you respond next in each of these and the many other situations that you face every day at work is critical. Not only for how you are seen and heard, but how you feel about yourself.

Triggers will drag you into the pit of self-loathing. You want to be seen as calm and collected, a consummate professional. But say the wrong thing in these important moments and you’re suddenly five years old again, crying at the unfairness of it all to your mom or your kindergarten teacher. Why can’t they just be nice? Why do they have to be so mean?
Dropping your typical reaction, when you go into Fight, Flight, or Freeze allows you to retake control of yourself, of your response.

You cannot ever take control of someone else. No matter how long and hard you try, you can only control your own responses.

This is hard stuff because we are wired to react for self-preservation.

Stop all chatter in your head, all the negative self-talk as you imagine what other people are thinking.

**Step 1** was required for you to recognize the physical responses to triggers so you can DROP your intuitive reactions.

**Step 2** is about recognizing that you typically react in one way but it’s in your best interest to DROP that habit and use new ones (coming next in Step 3).

Think of retaking control like managing a fire that’s quickly raging out-of-control.

You may be smiling on the outside, while exploding on the inside. You can’t keep that fire in for long before it explodes into reactionary words.

To retake control, take a deep breath.

This is simple and effective. It delivers much needed oxygen to your overloaded emotional system, which can shut down when you are aroused. Your brain gets oxygen and suddenly you can make a choice to respond instead of react.

Congratulations, you STOPPED your trigger, you DROPPED your intuitive reaction, now you are ready to ROLL!
Decide which way you want to ROLL…
do you want to be confident or curious?

Once you are in control of your reaction, you are ready to ROLL. It’s time to make a choice about which way you want to ROLL.
The Connector Conversation course will teach you four skills to ROLL with, let’s start with two of them.

ROLL toward Be Confident

Be Confident.
*What you say:* Be concise and clear. You say it and own it, don’t water down your response with too many reasons or apologies.
*What you look like:* Stand up straight. Confidence starts in your head and radiates outward.

ROLL toward Be Curious

Be Curious.
Stop the assumptions that are chattering in your head, all the negative self-talk as you imagine what other people are thinking. Don’t waste time making assumptions, be curious when you want to get real information.
EXAMPLE 1: Deb

Let’s go back to Deb, who was meeting with her boss about a project that was due in two weeks. Remember that she had emailed him a few ideas about how to streamline the process, but her boss hadn’t responded. She was worried going into the meeting that he hadn’t responded to her ideas because he thought they weren’t any good.

Fear triggered by feeling ignored.

ROLL toward Be Confident

“I’d like to check in with you about the ideas I sent you last week. Here’s a printed copy in case you need a reminder. I value your insights, so can we go through these ideas and talk about the pros and cons from your perspective?”

Notice there were no apologies, no self-doubts, nothing that showed any internal doubt about the quality of the ideas. You’re confident because you assume your ideas are good ones and that your boss has been too busy to respond.

ROLL toward Be Curious

“I’d like to check in with you about the ideas I sent you last week. Here’s a printed copy in case you need a reminder. You are usually very quick to answer my emails, so I’m curious why you didn’t respond?”

Notice that you simply ask the question and then be quiet. You are genuinely curious about what’s going on. You do not answer the question for your boss by saying, “Is it that the ideas weren’t good ones and you didn’t want to tell me that over email?” Nope, nothing, just be quiet and let your boss answer.

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EXAMPLE 2: Nicki

Let’s now go back to Nicki, who was presenting to a room of her peers and a few managers. Remember that she had put a lot of time into the presentation, practicing and rechecking her facts. Many of the people in the room were checking their phones or whispering to one another. One of the managers was nodding off. Her mind was reeling with self-doubt and she stammered in her presentation.

Fear triggered by feeling disrespected, ignored, or not valued.

**ROLL toward Be Confident**

“I’d like to stop and remind you what the objective is for this presentation. I’d like to get one outcome from each of you so that I know my presentation is on target.” Anything to retake control and get their attention back will make you look and feel confident. Stand up straight. Breathe, get some oxygen to your brain!

**ROLL toward Be Curious**

“What is resonating about my presentation with you right now?” Listen to what people say. If no one is able to respond because they weren’t paying attention, Nicki needs to get her audience involved by asking another question like, “What would be the ideal outcomes for each of you?”
EXAMPLE 3: Sam

Remember that Sam was the only woman in the room, which she was used to. The team decided on a course of action that she disagreed with. She knew the team was going for the quick fix and the solution wouldn’t work, so she spoke up. As she was walking through a different idea, another team member said, “Can you just get to the point? You’ve been going on and on for five minutes.” She stammered as she remembered that her feedback on her performance review was that she talked too much and needed to get to the point faster.

Fear triggered by feeling unheard, disrespected, and not included.

ROLL toward Be Confident

Rude behavior is often a tactic used to drain you of your power. Another one is asking questions that are only tangentially related to the topic. Remember that to be confident is in how you look and what you say: stand up straight. Take a breath; get some oxygen to your brain. When you respond, stick to the topic. Look confidently at the rude person and summarize your idea. Something like, “Let me summarize for you,” pulls the power back in your favor because you’re subtly acknowledging the rudeness. Do not allow the voice in your head to say anything judgmental. You will absolutely reel off into the abyss of self-criticism here if you are not steely-eyed in your determination to remain confident in the face of rude behavior. You will gain a ton of respect from everyone in the room when you pull this off.

ROLL toward Be Curious

In this situation, you need to be confident before you connect. Once you have regained control of the room by your confident actions, you can ask a question, “What about this idea do you like?” Start with the positive. And some people only ask about the positive, thinking that there’s no need to bring up the doubts since you are only sharing an idea in this meeting...the doubters will speak up long before any action is taken.
Next Steps for Negotiating with Confidence

You have a choice to change the dynamics of your conversations.
Taming your triggers is the first step to putting this connection in place, one that you can own, all by yourself, to help you be seen and heard as a confident and connected contributor.
Remember, when your head is exploding in a triggered moment: STOP, DROP, and ROLL.

Learn More

Books
Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create, and Lead by Tara Mohr
Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brene Brown
The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are by Brene Brown

Articles
Silence the Critical Voices in Your Head by Sabina Nawaz
How to Deal with Emotional Triggers by Martha Beck

TEDtalks
Brené Brown: Listening to shame
Amy Cuddy: Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are

Click here to read about the “Stop Drop and Roll” life saving technique to use if your clothes catch on fire. It’s from the “Learn not to burn” campaign. I just had to include this because “learn not to burn” is so catchy. Or not catchy if you do the technique correctly.
3 Steps to Get A Grip Worksheet

**step 1**

STOP your trigger

My physical responses to triggers are: ____________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

**step 2**

DROP your defensive reaction

I tend to go into ☐ FIGHT ☐ FLIGHT or ☐ FREEZE

What will you do to remind yourself how to retake control of *yourself, of your response*? __________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

**step 3**

Decide which way you want to ROLL...
do you want to be confident or curious?

*Be Confident: What will you say?* ________________________________________________

What will you physically do? (stand up straighter, etc). __________________________________

*Be Curious: What questions will you ask?* __________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

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