



Building a ROCKSTAR Team

Excerpt:
Building Team Trust and Collaboration

by
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CULTIVATE *Empathy*

About CULTIVATE *Empathy*

Cultivate Empathy empowers organizations to cultivate Rockstar Teams by creating cultures of inclusion. Through consultative programs, workshops, and coaching, we enable clients to develop core skills such as Self-Awareness, Curiosity, and Accountability. These skills are crucial for creating safe, inclusive spaces for everyone to be their authentic selves.

Learn to shine brightly in your full power and make it safe for others to do the same.

"We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are."
Anaïs Nin



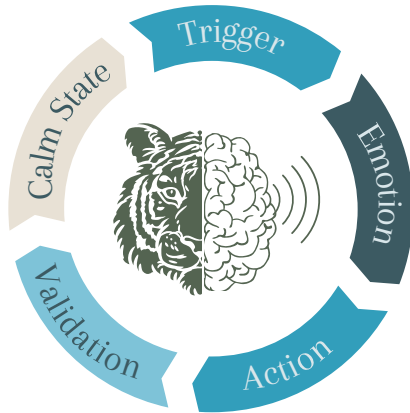
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the emotional cycle



Our brains are hard-wired to react to emotional threats the same way it reacts to physical ones. Your brain literally believes that the jerk you work with is the same threat level as a tiger.

Any perceived threat can be a trigger. A single, highly traumatic experience can cause significant reactions after even the smallest reminder. A trigger can be a reaction to a stressful situation that you have experienced many times. Repeated experiences can significantly amplify triggers, even to the point of trauma.

Triggers create an immediate physiological response. Your body floods with hormones to help you address the threat: racing heart, sweaty palms, a need to yell.

In fact, emotions have two components: the physiological response and the story that we are telling ourselves to justify the continuing reaction. The physiological response prepares you for taking an Action: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. For example, when a car suddenly cuts you off, you do not stay scared for more than a few moments...

...unless you had been in a serious car accident before, in which case you might be in an agitated state for hours. The threat is no longer present, but the story will keep you locked into fear because of your traumatic experience.

In a tiger attack, you take action, then look to your community for validation about what you experienced and confirm that the threat has passed. Your community's Validation allows your body to return to a Calm State.

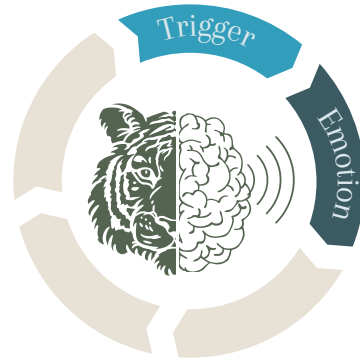
Unfortunately, in our modern lives, threats are less straightforward than a tiger. Validation is necessary to get us back to a state of calm. But validation is impossible unless you can explain what you are really feeling, and what you are making the whole situation mean.

The practice of self-awareness will unlock your ability to receive validation from loved ones, and help return you to a calm state.



unpacking the story

Since your brain treats that jerk you work with like a literal tiger, begin by understanding the subconscious threat. This will reveal a pattern that needs to be healed.



ID the emotion

"Upset" is insufficient. Try to be more specific than mad, sad, or glad. Also, you are probably feeling more than one emotion.

If you find it difficult to describe the specific feeling, try an analogy. Does it remind you of an episode of *Living Single* or maybe *Game of Thrones*? What was the character feeling?

If that fails, start saying names of feelings to yourself to find one or more that fits. The most common emotions are anger, sadness, happiness, fear, disgust, admiration, anxiousness, guilt, shame, surprise, disappointment, satisfaction, love, amusement, awkwardness, boredom, loneliness, awe, envy, interest, pride, contempt, hatred, and sympathy.



why?

Why this feeling? What is the story behind it? There are two parts to emotions: the physiological response, and the story we tell ourselves about what is happening.

Unpack the story. Act like a toddler and keep asking yourself "Why" until you have an aha moment.

You will feel it when you get to the bottom of the story.



what does it mean?

When was the last time you felt this way? What does this experience tell you about yourself?

Significant emotional reactions are almost always a mirror of past traumatic experiences.

Connect your aha moment to the prior trauma to understand how today's experience is feeding on unresolved wounds.

Conclude by describing how you are judging yourself.

example

What am I feeling?

*I'm angry!!!! She doesn't listen to me
and I can't stand it!*



Why am I angry?

*Because she is making ridiculous choices and I
know how to help her. But she won't listen to me!*

Why am I angry that she won't listen?

I am trying to help her but she doesn't care what I think.

Why am I angry that she doesn't care what I think?

I'm worried that she doesn't respect me.

What am I making it mean?

*Aaah, I see. This feels just like my
experience with my former manager. He
was so dismissive and condescending! It
still has me doubting myself.*

Conclusion: I doubt myself too much.



what happened? how do I feel?

why do I feel this emotion? why? why? why?

what is the story I am telling myself?

grace

Now that you understand the story that causes intense and prolonged emotional reactions, you have uncovered the pattern of unhealed pain and a sticky spot in your emotional cycle. Let's start breaking the pattern.



the soul punch

Remember that Aha moment when you dug deep; did you feel like you got slapped when it came to you? We like to call that the Soul Punch, or a metaphorical wake-up call to heal this hurt.

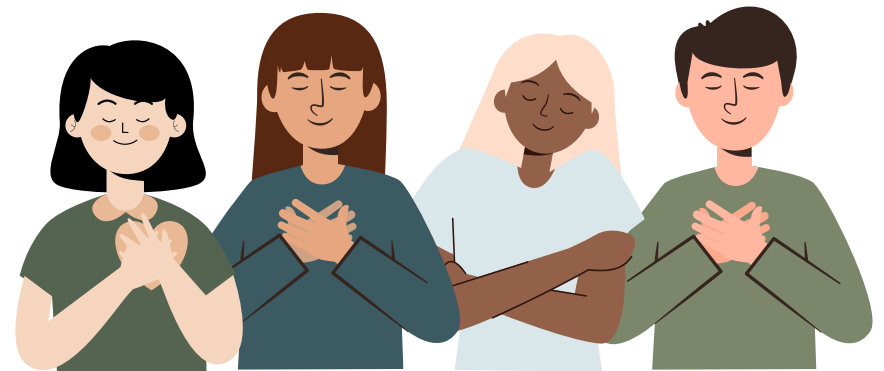
Ignoring this trauma has not worked for you. Healing it requires that you acknowledge its power and what it is trying to teach you. It will keep popping up until the lesson is met with compassion and imperfect resilience.



you deserve compassion

Would you ever be as cruel to your bestie as you are to yourself? Most people are their own worst critic! Caustic self-talk only prolongs the suffering.

Imagine that your emotions are a toddler in a tantrum: telling a toddler to "Shut UP!" will only make them cry harder. If you were talking to your daughter or nephew, would you ever be as cruel as you are to yourself? Instead, what would you say to show them grace and compassion?



example

What is the Soul Punch I'm feeling?

*I've been doubting myself for so long
that I don't know how to stop. Why do
I still let her have such a hold over
me? Why do I still choose to believe
that I deserve people's disrespect?*



How can I show myself compassion?

*You are doing the best you can with the
tools you have.*

*She really messed you up and it's not
easy to do things differently. The great
news is that you are working on
breaking this pattern. Today was a bad
day, but you can try again tomorrow.*



what is the unhealed wound?

How can I give myself grace?

curious and caring

Humans have an innate tendency to judge others. Especially people that we perceive to be different than ourselves. Judgment is particularly caustic in working relationships because it creates an impervious barrier. Anything they suggest, we dismiss as being unworthy, not because their idea is poor, but because we see the person as unworthy.

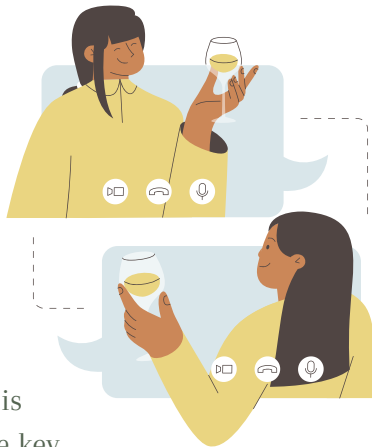
curiosity unlocks empathy

"Empathy is believing that their experience is true and valid."
-Dr. Brene Brown

Empathy is hard-wired for humans but is **not** automatic; it's a conscious choice to allow ourselves to feel what another feels.

Trying to find empathy for a person you have been judging is challenging, but curiosity is the key.

When we offer genuine kindness with curiosity, our brains switch to empathy. Curiosity should feel warm, like a desire to understand the human being and their experience.



Do you fully understand their experience and perspective? What is the story they are telling themselves? How can you show them compassion?

judging them, judging yourself

Judgment of others often comes from embarrassment or disdain for things we dislike about ourselves. Try reframing your judgment as an opportunity for compassion.

How does their bad behavior remind you of yourself? What can you say to yourself (and them) to show love and support?



example

Write down three or more open-ended curiosity questions.

- *What was your experience this past year?*
- *What/who has been a significant influence in shaping your perspective?*
- *What is something that sparks joy for you?*



use the trust fund

Relationships with a strong foundation of trust can endure most disagreements. It may be daunting to acknowledge any harm caused and set boundaries, but it's essential. Strong trust is like a bank account that can be drawn upon to overcome relationship challenges.

boundaries

Boundaries keep us safe and set rules for our relationships. When you unexpectedly explode in anger, it's usually because someone crossed one of your boundaries. Even small breaches of your boundaries can damage the trust you have built.

When you communicate about the boundary, take ownership of your feelings. Communicate what you would have preferred to have happened, so they know how to honor your boundaries next time.

Which boundary did they cross? Do they understand that boundary? Also, did you cross one of their boundaries?

"You're not responsible for my feelings, but I need you to respect my boundaries."



accountability

Accountability is a rare experience in American society. We are used to milk toast apologies, i.e., “I’m sorry you feel that way.” For trust to endure conflict, we need to feel that our needs will be met and we will be respected.

Accountability combines remorse, apology, and a commitment to do better next time. Hold yourself accountable for the pain you caused, express your remorse, and how you will do better. next time.

Who needs to be accountable to whom? Did they cross one of your boundaries? Did you cross one of theirs?



example

Describe your boundary and how it feels to have it crossed.

I'm still healing from working for my former manager, who was incredibly disrespectful, so I have set a rigid boundary about condescending tones and words. Any time I hear condescension, I get triggered.

Practice accountability. How would you express remorse, responsibility, and commit to do better?

I hear how much hurt I caused, and I'm so sorry. I regret having said that. I promise to take a few breaths and calm down before I speak out of anger again.



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Identify your Feeling(s):

Why, Why, Why...What's the Aha?

The Story I'm Telling Myself...

I Need to Enforce a Boundary.

My Curiosity Questions.

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What Did Your Curiosity Reveal?

How Were You Accountable to Each Other?

In a Perfect World, What is the Ideal Outcome?

Yours

Theirs

What are the Mutual Asks?

What is the Gap that needs to be Overcome?

grateful for you

We hope you enjoyed using this excerpt of the Cultivate Empathy Journal!

Every Cultivate Empathy coaching client receives a full copy, which includes practices for Release Valves, Returning to a Calm State, Building Relationships, and Graceful Accountability.

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