

**WORKBOOK: A PRACTICAL
GUIDE TO EMOTIONAL MASTERY.**

A Practical Guide to Emotional Mastery.

Mind the curve.

Emotional intelligence, also known as EQ, is important for personal and professional success. EQ is a skill that can be trained and improved. Here are some tips on where to begin.

EQ begins with self-awareness.

The foundation of EQ is self-awareness: the ability to sense and understand the patterns of emotional upheaval in your own system. Only when you become aware of these patterns can you begin to control how you respond to them.

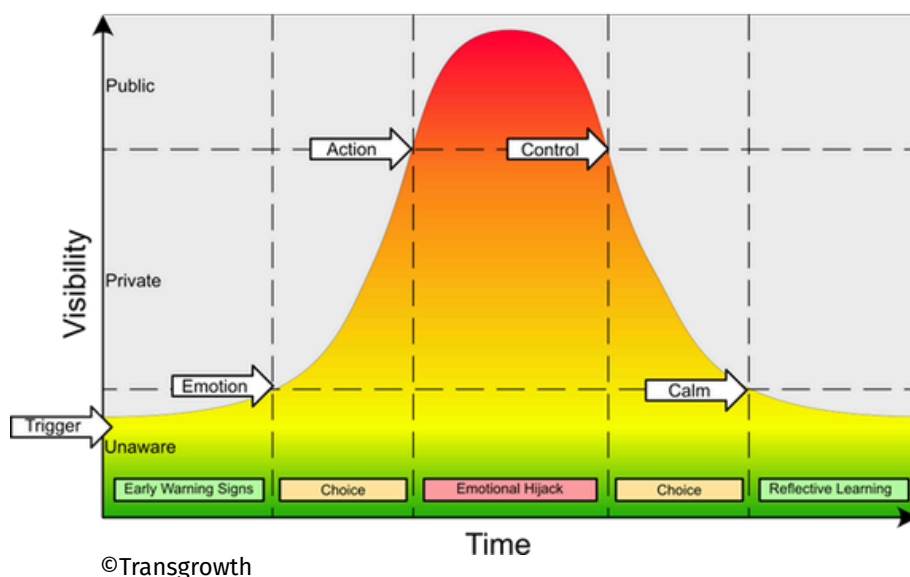
Emotional upheavals.

Our emotions are constantly changing in response to internal and external stimuli. When they are very strong, our emotions don't just make themselves known, they can take over control and cause us to act in ways we do not consciously choose. Such emotional peaks are called emotional upheavals: emotional peaks that disappear as quickly as they arrive, catch us unaware, and cause us to do and say things we often later regret.

Some examples of emotional-upheaval-driven behaviours are:

- Failing to speak up at a crucial moment in a meeting
- Freezing in the middle of a public speech
- Stubbornly refusing to budge on an issue of minor importance, while conceding it would create a much better position on a major issue
- Verbally lashing out at someone and immediately regretting it

All emotional upheavals follow a similar curve: they get triggered, they rise in intensity until they cause an emotional response, then they gradually subside, until the emotion is no longer present (see Figure 1).



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Understanding this curve helps explain the dynamics of our emotional behaviours. The curve shows five transition points where the emotional upheaval changes both in its intensity and its effect on your system. Training your awareness of when emotional transitions occur and how you respond to them are the road to self-mastery and control.

Transition 1: From Trigger to Emotion - Early Warning Signs.

Something triggers the emotion, nearly always invisible, even to yourself. The trigger can be external or internal. In this early stage, it's hard to feel the emotion itself because it remains below your level of conscious awareness.

Once triggered, the emotion grows in power, until it becomes strong enough to move from the unconscious to conscious level. By that time, the emotion has grown in strength and momentum, making it harder to stop its rise to even higher levels. Fortunately, when triggered by a rising emotion, your body starts preparing itself for the action it feels coming, even if you consciously don't feel anything yet. This physical preparation makes itself known through subtle signals you can train yourself to recognise.

Examples are:

- Blushing
- Itching
- Sweaty palms
- Tensing of muscles
- Rapid breathing
- An urge to snack
- Hairs rising in the back of your neck
- Shivers down your spine

Practice Opportunities.

Becoming physically aware enough to pick up on these early warning signals gives you more of a chance to deflect or neutralise the trigger and to stop the emotional upheaval before it gains too much momentum. A good habit to form is doing a Mind/Body Scan (see pages 6 and 7) to improve your physical awareness, which helps you recognise early warning signs as soon as they occur.

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Transition 2: From Emotion to Action - Choice.

Once you are aware of the emotion, the emotional upheaval will create a rising urge to respond. At this point, the emotion is not yet visible to anyone but yourself. The emotion will keep gaining momentum, until it moves you into a physical response. The higher it peaks, the less control you will have over the "what" and "how" of the actual response.

In the short space of time between feeling the emotion and physically responding, there is still a moment of choice. There is a last-minute opportunity to deflect the oncoming response. This requires awareness and presence: awareness of the fact that an emotional hijack is about to happen, and the presence of mind to know what action is required to prevent that hijack.

Practice Opportunities.

Practices for this transition focus on improving your ability to exert control over the switch-over from emotion to action. By delaying that transition even for one or two seconds, you may be able to avert the actual hijack, letting the emotion subside before it has pushed you into an automatic, predetermined response.

Some of the recommended practices are:

1. Extract yourself from the situation
2. Take conscious, slow breaths
3. Practise the observer perspective

Transition 3: From Action to Control - The Hijack.

When the emotional upheaval rises enough to trigger an actual physical response, we enter the hijack state of the curve. In this state, you have very little control over the nature of your response. Such automatic responses are often inappropriate, especially in a business environment, because most of our basic emotional responses were established when we were very young, practically defenseless, and completely dependent on the adults around us. This means that when an emotional hijack occurs, we often react from the perspective of a 4-year-old!

During the hijack itself, there is not much that can be done. After all, a true hijack means control is no longer in the hands of your rational, conscious mind, but of your primal, automatic response system. So, what can you do in this highly emotional, potentially career-limiting situation? The good news is that emotional hijacks seldom last very long. The duration of a hijack can be measured in minutes: on average between 3 and 7 minutes. Hijacks are geared toward short, explosive, high-energy responses that run out of energy quickly. The best you can do when a hijack hits, therefore, is to try to do as little as possible.

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Practice Opportunities.

In effect, practices to control hijacks focus more on preventing them from happening than on controlling the hijacks themselves. The techniques described for the other transitions help to:

- Deflect and dampen the emotional upheaval before it peaks into a hijack
- Minimise its impact by reducing the height, duration and momentum of the peak before it hits
- Prevent it from retriggering after it has run its course

Continued practice has been proven to reduce general stress levels, which makes you less likely to get triggered, and less extreme when you do.

Transition 4: From Control to Calm - Choice.

Once the hijack subsides, your conscious control returns. This always happens - no-one can sustain an emotional hijack indefinitely - but the transition from being in control to being calm again is not always a smooth one. As soon as the hijack is over, you may be tempted to look back at what just happened. Because our emotional mind does not distinguish between external and internal triggers, just thinking about what triggered the emotion can often be enough to trigger a new upheaval, up to and including a new hijack.

The most important thing right after control returns to your conscious mind is to try and return to a state of calm. This may take a few moments; the emotional energy needs time to dissipate. The higher the peak, the more time is needed to return to a calm state of mind.

Practice Opportunities.

Three practices can help to ensure you return to a state of calm instead of triggering the next emotional hijack:

1. Conscious, slow breathing
2. Using the Mind/Body Scan (see The Snapshot handout) to observe your own reactions and understand why and how your emotions were triggered
3. Reframing the event in positive terms

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Transition 5: From Calm Onwards - Learning.

As the emotional energy sinks back to unconscious levels, your emotional system evaluates, classifies and integrates the event and your responses to adjust and fine-tune your set of learned behaviours. This gives you a window of opportunity to influence the way your emotional system learns from what just happened.

Practice Opportunities.

Here are some ways to positively impact your emotional system's learning process:

1. Take the time to recall the event and your response to it, all the while making sure you stay calm and focused. Examine closely what happened: What triggered you, why did it trigger you, how did that lead to your reaction and why that particular reaction?
2. Next, ask yourself: Was this really successful and appropriate? Did it serve any of your longer-term goals, instead of just satisfying your immediate emotional needs and urges? If not, what could you have done differently to get a better outcome?
3. Visualise yourself taking alternative actions, responding not as your emotion dictated, but as your conscious self considers more appropriate

Conclusion: It is all about practice.

Understanding the emotional curve helps understand the mechanisms that lead to and govern emotional upheavals and helps you identify a number of control points you can leverage to influence and retrain your emotional system. Influencing the different transition points requires different techniques, so it is important to learn to recognise the different stages in yourself.

The practices mentioned here are just a few of the many practices that can help you with managing your emotional upheaval curve. Practising them regularly will strengthen your emotional "muscles," giving you a better chance of managing emotional upheavals when they get triggered. Even a single practice, when done regularly, will contribute to noticeable improvements in your emotional intelligence.

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Activity: A Mind/Body Scan.

Introduction.

Doing a Mind/Body Scan daily after an emotional upheaval helps improve your physical and emotional awareness.

By observing how you feel, what you sense in your body, how your energy is and so on, you are training yourself to be more receptive to the subtle signals your body produces in response to physical and emotional changes.

Regularly doing this scan will, over time, reveal patterns and rhythms that helps you better understand your emotional system and what it gets triggered by.

Instructions.

Do this scan at least once a day and whenever you have calmed down after an emotional upheaval.

- Make yourself comfortable and take a few deep breaths to clear your mind
- Complete the without thinking too much about it. Usually, the first answer that comes up is the best answer and there are no wrong answers.
- Questions 1-5: Rank how you're feeling on a scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high).
- Questions 6 and 7: Open text to keep track of your thoughts and emotions.

When you look back over your scans, the precise answers are not as important as the changes you observe between scans. Those changes can help you identify patterns in your physical/emotional system by exploring why these changes occur, under what circumstances, at what times of the day and following which events.

The better you understand the particularities of your own system, the easier it will be to become aware of changes that signal impending emotional upheavals.

Activity: A Mind/Body Scan.

Energy.

My energy level is very low. I feel tired/ listless/ down.



My energy level is high. I feel completely energetic and vitalised.

Presence.

I'm not present at all. My head is somewhere else, and my thoughts are floating nowhere in particular.



I'm completely "with it": my attention is fully in the here and now.

Tension.

I am very tense. I can't seem to be able to relax.



I'm completely relaxed and at ease.

Balance.

I feel totally out of balance and out of control.



I feel completely in balance and in control.

Body awareness.

If I had not stopped to think about it I would have almost forgotten I even have a body.



I am completely aware of my body. I can feel every part of it and every sensation.

My thoughts right now:

My emotions right now:

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