

Navigating Difficult Situations in the Workplace

How to control your reactions
and respond effectively



Program Workbook

Video Session 4

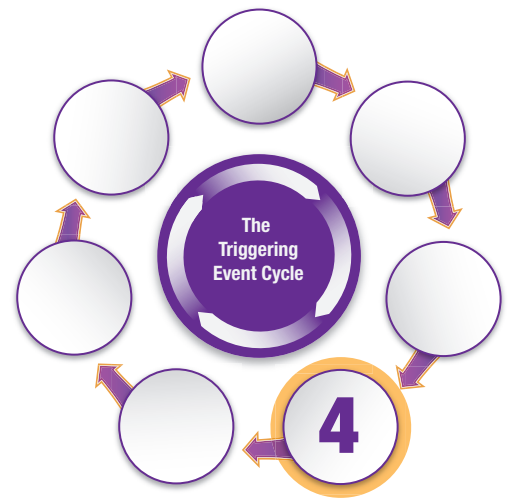
By **Kathy Obear, Ed.D.**

Part 4

**Make
Different
Choices:
More Self-
Management
Tools**

Video Session 4

Step 4: Identify Common Negative Thoughts and Self-Limiting Beliefs



"It is the mind that makes the body." Sojourner Truth

Directions: Our thoughts are like songs on a playlist that is stuck in repeat play mode. They will keep replaying over and over until we reject them and replace them with a new playlist! But we first need to recognize our old songs that may need updating. Below is a list of some common negative thoughts that people have at Step 4 about themselves, others, and the situation. Check-off (☑) any that seem familiar:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> I can't handle this! | <input type="radio"/> What if I completely ruin this? |
| <input type="radio"/> The last time this happened I just froze and fell apart | <input type="radio"/> They will be angry when they hear about this I could make it worse |
| <input type="radio"/> I am not smart enough, good enough, competent enough, creative enough... | <input type="radio"/> I have to get this right! |
| <input type="radio"/> I will never be able to get this done in time | <input type="radio"/> I will let people down, disappoint them |
| <input type="radio"/> I am such a fraud | <input type="radio"/> People could be hurt if I don't do this well |
| <input type="radio"/> I will never be able to do this | <input type="radio"/> This could hurt my career |
| <input type="radio"/> What I do won't make any difference | <input type="radio"/> I will make a fool of myself |
| <input type="radio"/> Things won't change | <input type="radio"/> What if no one likes me |
| <input type="radio"/> What do I have to offer? | <input type="radio"/> I won't fit in or be accepted |

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> I could be all alone in this situation | <input type="radio"/> They are so incompetent |
| <input type="radio"/> What if I lose control? | <input type="radio"/> They are all hypocrites |
| <input type="radio"/> This is out of control! | <input type="radio"/> They always make things so complicated |
| <input type="radio"/> They won't understand | <input type="radio"/> This is going to be so hard and difficult |
| <input type="radio"/> They will attack me just like last time | <input type="radio"/> No one else will ever step up to do any meaningful work on this project |
| <input type="radio"/> No one appreciates all I do for them | <input type="radio"/> Everyone is always so difficult and unreasonable |
| <input type="radio"/> If I confront them, they will ostracize me | <input type="radio"/> She is always so rude and obnoxious |
| <input type="radio"/> They are so biased and prejudiced | <input type="radio"/> No one cares about what I think or feel |
| <input type="radio"/> They are such @!*^#! jerks | <input type="radio"/> They are so self-centered |
| <input type="radio"/> They don't know what they are doing | <input type="radio"/> They'll just drop the ball again and I'll have to clean it all up as usual |
| <input type="radio"/> This is such a waste of time just like it always is | <input type="radio"/> This will be like that time everything was such a disaster |
| <input type="radio"/> I am smarter than any of them | |



Step 4: Self-Management Tools ~ Change Your Thoughts













I no longer agree to treat myself with disrespect. Every time a self-critical thought comes to mind, I will forgive the Judge and follow this comment with words of praise, self-acceptance, and love.
- Miguel Ruiz

Directions: The unproductive, self-limiting thoughts we have during difficult situations decrease our effectiveness in the moment. When we change these thoughts, we are better positioned to choose effective responses. Below are some examples of how to change negative thoughts at Step 4:

When you think:	You can shift your thoughts to:
They're not getting it! This is a failure!	I will do the best I can. I am not responsible for everyone's learning. People will take away from here what they need.
I should know the answer to that!	I am not the expert here. My role is to facilitate the team's creativity. I can say, "I don't know," and ask others for their input.
You are such a *%^*#!* for interrupting me!	I don't appreciate his timing, but at least he is willing to engage in this dialogue...He seems to have a lot of energy about this topic so maybe he has some good ideas to add...
I can't handle this!	If I make a mistake, I can use it to model that we can learn from errors and keep moving...
He is such an ignorant bigot!	I wonder why he feels so threatened? When have I felt or said something like this in the past? How can I respond to his inappropriate comment and also let him "save face?"
Her reaction is so unprofessional!	I wonder what is really going on for her. Did I say or do something that was a trigger for her?
They are so resistant!	They seem to feel safe enough to be honest about their concerns. Now we can get to the heart of this issue and maybe find a solution that meets all of our needs.
What a *@?!?# jerk!	I wonder what has happened recently that has him reacting this way?

Step 4: Self-Management Tools: Change Your Thoughts, page 2 of 2

Think about a recent difficult situation and write down several unproductive thoughts you were thinking at that time. Then identify alternative thoughts that could leave you feeling less triggered, if not more open and curious.

When you think:	You can shift your thoughts to:
	
	
	
	
	
	

Step 4: Self-Management Tools: Calming Statements



Directions: Read the following phrases and note which ones may be useful to help you get more grounded and centered during difficult situations.

Remind yourself about the dynamics of triggers

- I'm just triggered right now...this too shall pass...
- It's not about them, there's something going on in me...
- This could be a powerful learning moment for them, for me...

Focus on what is positive

- At least they are willing to engage in this conversation...
- A few people seem to be reflecting and more open...
- What can I learn and take away from this situation to help me in the future?

Trust the process

- Everything happens for a reason...trust the process...
- Hmm, this is curious...I wonder why this is happening right now?
- I may have over-estimated what's possible in this moment...what would be a reasonable next step from here?
- I'll just wait and see what emerges...

Adjust your approach

- She may not be willing to engage right now, but I'll bet some other folks will...
- So that approach didn't seem to work...what else can I try?
- I have responded effectively in similar situations, I can do it again.

Focus on the intent of others

- They're doing the best they can with the knowledge and resources they have...
- He's just trying to meet unmet needs...
- I trust they are not intentionally trying to undermine me...

What other thoughts would help you center yourself in difficult situations?



Step 5: Identify Unproductive, “Negative” Intentions You Sometimes Choose



When I am more aware of my common negative, unproductive intentions I am more likely to notice when I am about to react out of them in the moment. This split second of awareness can be enough for you to shift your thinking and choose to focus on more productive intentions.

Directions: Think about a few times you have reacted less effectively during difficult conversations. As you review the following examples, check-off any of these less productive intentions that seem familiar to you, and add any additional ones (I have reacted out of all of them at some point!):

<input type="checkbox"/>	win the argument
<input type="checkbox"/>	get even, get them back
<input type="checkbox"/>	to be right, prove the other person wrong
<input type="checkbox"/>	to prove you are competent, smart
<input type="checkbox"/>	assert your power and authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	gain status and prestige, be admired
<input type="checkbox"/>	be in control
<input type="checkbox"/>	intimidate the other person
<input type="checkbox"/>	“put them in their place”
<input type="checkbox"/>	shut them down
<input type="checkbox"/>	punish the other person
<input type="checkbox"/>	embarrass or put them down
<input type="checkbox"/>	keep the conversation “under control”
<input type="checkbox"/>	be liked, fit in

<input type="checkbox"/>	change the other person’s views, feelings, or behaviors
<input type="checkbox"/>	to make people learn
<input type="checkbox"/>	trick and “outfox” the other person
<input type="checkbox"/>	avoid intense emotions, in self and others
<input type="checkbox"/>	make everyone feel happy and harmonious
<input type="checkbox"/>	avoid feeling or being viewed as “incompetent”
<input type="checkbox"/>	control how others feel about you
<input type="checkbox"/>	ignore them
<input type="checkbox"/>	use the current opportunity to “right the wrongs” you experienced in the past
<input type="checkbox"/>	seek approval of others
<input type="checkbox"/>	avoid confrontation and conflict
<input type="checkbox"/>	make them feel the pain you feel

Any others that come to mind?



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Next, imagine thinking some of these negative intentions. How might you react unproductively if you think these?



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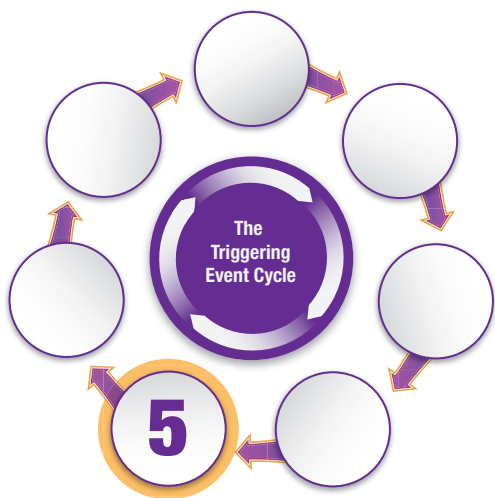
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Step 5: Identify the More Productive, “Positive” Intentions You Sometimes Choose

Directions: Below is a list of some of the more productive and “positive” intentions we can choose at Step 5. Check-off any that you commonly think about before you respond in difficult situations. Then star (*) those you would like to add to your “tool kit.”

<input type="checkbox"/>	engage in respectful dialogue
<input type="checkbox"/>	create greater inclusion
<input type="checkbox"/>	facilitate open, honest discussion
<input type="checkbox"/>	do no harm
<input type="checkbox"/>	leave people feeling whole
<input type="checkbox"/>	“go with the flow,” trust the process
<input type="checkbox"/>	deepen learning and growth
<input type="checkbox"/>	meet people “where they are” without judgment
<input type="checkbox"/>	use the triggering moment to deepen understanding
<input type="checkbox"/>	relate to the person, connect with them
<input type="checkbox"/>	invite people to learn from the situation
<input type="checkbox"/>	take time to “gather yourself”
<input type="checkbox"/>	create space for the other person to express their feelings, perceptions
<input type="checkbox"/>	deepen understanding across differences

<input type="checkbox"/>	acknowledge they are doing the best they can with the resources and knowledge they have at this moment
<input type="checkbox"/>	create safety for the expression of differing viewpoints
<input type="checkbox"/>	encourage more people to engage in the discussion
<input type="checkbox"/>	support people to disagree with each other in respectful ways
<input type="checkbox"/>	model effective recovery skills when your behavior results in negative impact
<input type="checkbox"/>	re-establish credibility with the person or group
<input type="checkbox"/>	interrupt unproductive, inappropriate behaviors and group dynamics
<input type="checkbox"/>	model the values you espouse: respect, authenticity, empathy, self-reflection, engagement...
<input type="checkbox"/>	build a “bridge” and a connection with the other person
<input type="checkbox"/>	create more effective relationships and coalitions

Any others that come to mind?



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Next, imagine thinking some of these positive intentions. How might you respond out of these intentions?



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Step 5: Shift Negative Intentions

When we choose negative intentions we are more likely to react in unproductive ways. Below is an example that shows how we can change how we respond effectively at Step 6 by shifting our intentions.





A client shared a common difficult situation they often experience on Search Committees. When the Chair asked the members for feedback on the three finalists for the position, one senior leader, Jerry said, "I like Chad. And Kelly would be fine as well. But Tiana wouldn't be a good fit. Don't get me wrong, I think diversity is important, but we also don't want to lower our standards." She was furious when no one else countered his comments. Once again she was the only one who had the courage to speak up and confront these discriminatory behaviors. Her first thought was to say something like, "This is another example of racist practices that keep our organization so lily white!" But she stopped herself knowing that this would be a CEM, a career-ending move! A couple other people offered their assessment of the candidates while she took a few deep breaths and thought through her options. She then said, "I want to ask us to slow down a moment. Before we make our recommendations, I'd like us to revisit the core competencies we identified for this position and then use these as we offer our feedback about each candidate. I actually liked all three of them on a personal level, but I think we will find some clear distinctions when we assess their demonstrated capacities against our envisioned outcomes." After a pause that seemed to last forever, the Chair agreed and they started to center the competencies in our conversation.

In the following chart I have summarized key elements of her story.

<p>1. The less productive, “negative” intentions</p> <p>Embarrass the colleague; call him out on his racist comment; show everyone else what they should be doing in similar situations</p>	<p>3. More productive, “positive” intentions</p> <p>Address the inappropriate comment in a way that furthers learning; Refocus the conversation on competencies, away from personal opinions and “likability” of the candidates; model how to engage effectively and maintain working relationships</p>
<p>2. When we react less productively, what is the probable impact of our reaction?</p> <p>If she had done this, she might have damaged her relationship with her colleague and other members of the committee; others wouldn’t have learned how to be more effective in similar situations; she may have lost credibility in this group to influence future decisions</p>	<p>4. The impact when we respond out of these positive intentions</p> <p>When she responded this way, the group members readily focused on competencies including the capacity to create inclusive work environments and effectively serve the increasingly diverse client populations; her colleague was able to “save face” and actually participated in identifying a few competencies; she believe they ended up identifying the most competent candidate for their needs</p>

Directions: Think about a recent difficult situation in which you reacted unproductively. Make some notes in the chart that follows using the following prompts:

1. In section #1, write out 1-2 of the less productive, negative intentions you had in that moment.
2. In section #2, write how you reacted less effectively and the probable impact of your reaction.
3. In section #3, rewrite these negative intentions into more productive ones.
4. In section #4, anticipate how you MIGHT have responded more productively out of these more positive, productive intentions; and the probable impact of this response

<p>1. The less productive, “negative” intentions</p> 	<p>3. Rewrite into more productive, “positive” intentions</p> 
<p>2. How did you react less productively? What was the probable impact of your reaction?</p> 	<p>4. How might you have responded? What might be the impact from responding out of these positive intentions?</p> 

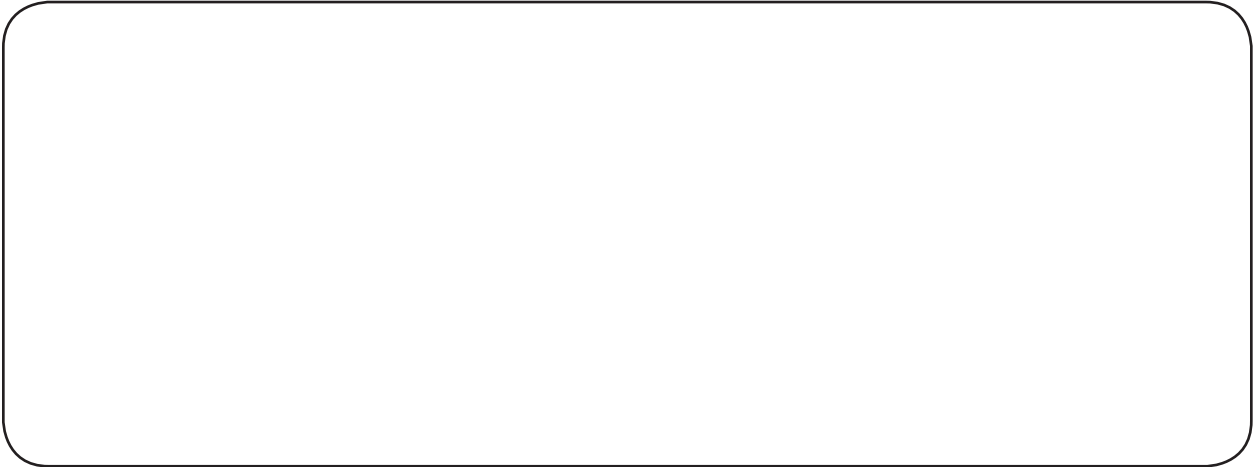
Anticipate Future Difficult Situations: Practice Shifting Negative Intentions to More Positive, Productive Ones

Directions: Anticipate a future difficult situation in which you might react unproductively. Make your notes below using the following prompts:


- 1 **In section #1:** Write out 1–2 of the less productive, negative intentions you had in that moment.
- 2 **In section #2:** Write how you might react less effectively out of these negative intentions.
- 3 **In section #3:** Rewrite these negative intentions into more productive ones.
- 4 **In section #4:** Anticipate how you MIGHT respond more productively out of these more positive, productive intentions.

1. My less productive, “negative” intentions

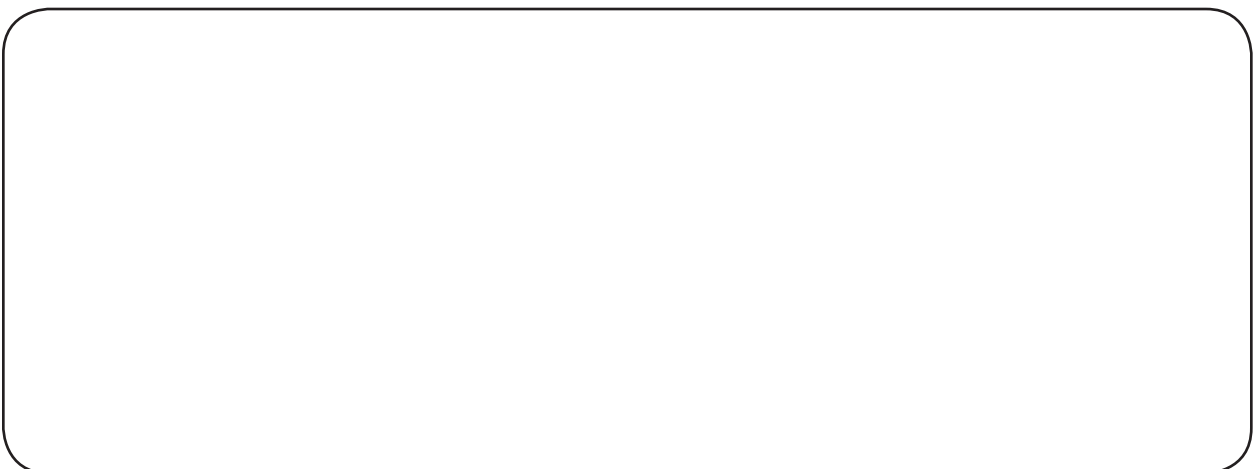
2. How I might react less productively, less effectively



3. More productive, "positive" intentions



4. How I MIGHT respond more productively out of these intentions












Step 5: Consider the Intentions and Unmet Needs of Others

Directions: In difficult situations, I can de-escalate the intensity of my emotions by considering the possible unmet needs and intentions that could be fueling the behaviors I find disruptive and ineffective. From a more grounded stance I am far more likely to respond in effective ways. I first learned of this approach through the work of Marshall Rosenberg and Nonviolent Communication.

For each of the scenarios below, imagine what might be the unmet needs fueling the person's unproductive behaviors. Some of the needs and values that seem particularly related to difficult situations I experience include dignity, respect, trust, integrity, safety, belonging, acceptance, honesty, connection, support, mutuality, partnering, community, ease, harmony, fairness, understanding, clarity, recognition, competence, effectiveness, consideration, purpose, equity, and inclusion.

Unproductive behavior	Their possible unmet needs
1. Gossiping about you to colleagues	To belong, to matter, self-expression, connection
2. Someone stays quiet and colludes with offensive behaviors	Safety, security, to belong, peace, acceptance
3. Someone is texting on their smart phone during the conversation.	
4. Someone is trying to control and micro-manage tasks	
5. Someone looks away from you as you are talking to them and asks someone else a question.	
6. 	
7. 	

Step 5: Consider the Intentions and Unmet Needs of Others, page 2 of 2

Take a moment and focus only on the unproductive behavior:

What are your thoughts and feelings about this person?



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Then, only focus on their possible unmet needs:

What are your thoughts and feelings now?



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When I take the time to explore what needs someone may be trying to meet in a difficult dialogue, I gain more understanding and enough distance from them to feel less triggered and more open to engaging them in productive ways.

For further resources:

Gill, R., Leu, L., & Morin, J. (2009). *NVC toolkit*. BookSurge Publishing.

Rosenberg, M. (2005). *Nonviolent communication: A language of life*. Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press.

kathy obear

EXECUTIVE/LIFE COACH



choose courage. speak your truth. live on purpose.

If you are interested in inviting me to speak to the members of your organization or if you would like to explore ways to work with me as an Executive Coach or Life Coach, please contact me:

Dr. Kathy Obear

www.drkathyobear.com

kathy@drkathyobear.com

Workbook and video slides designed by:

Pamela Graglia Freelance Design

pamela.graglia@gmail.com