

## Practical Exercises to build bounce back in your team – recognising your triggers and managing emotions



In our article “How do you adapt and thrive when the going gets tough” we offered ideas to build the kind of resilience that means individuals and teams adapt and thrive (rather than ‘toughing it out’ or being triggered into knee jerk reactions).

Today, we share a practical exercise that helps build awareness and understanding in teams so that they spot triggers early, have each other’s backs and support each other to bounce back.

### ***Exercise: Spotting and managing your emotions***

This exercise gives team members a framework for recognizing and noticing different emotions and enables them to spot what they need and find what works for them and others.

#### **What you will need:**

- Masking tape (to map out the quadrants on the floor)
- Brief for this exercise (see below)
- Slides or a flipchart with the framework
- Suggested coaching questions (email us for these and the visual)
- Sample adjectives (email us for these and the visual)

**Time taken:** 50-90 minutes

**Group size:** up to 16 (ideally even numbers). Note this needs floor space.

**Step 1: Sharing the framework (5')** (see image at the top of this article and email us for a copy)

First share the 2 axes which are:

*Vertical Axis:* High energy (top) Low energy (bottom)

*Horizontal Axis:* Negative emotions (left) Positive emotions (right).

Share the names of the 4 quadrants and, as you do so, invite an example of an adjective that would articulate how someone would feel in this quadrant (this is a quick way of testing the group's understanding):

- Thriving (High energy, Positive emotions)
- Surviving (High energy, Negative emotions)
- Burnout (Low energy, Negative emotions)
- Recharge (Low energy, Positive emotions).

**Step 2: Give out cards with adjectives (15')**

Ask the group to place the adjectives in each quadrant (it can be useful to do this in pairs).

Explore questions and invite them to challenge each other. This builds awareness of the nuances of emotions and what they might indicate (whether in themselves or someone else).

**Step 3: Peer coaching (20')**

***N.B. Be sure to agree or reiterate confidentiality before you start – individuals may share sensitive issues which they want kept private. You can offer them the option to do this in silence with their partner asking questions.***

Explain that the purpose of the coaching is to enable your partner to build awareness and explore triggers for negative emotions and strategies to move them into a more resourceful state. Be clear that the intention is that one person asks questions, listens, and summarises, whilst the other explores. This isn't about offering ideas or advice.

Offer them questions to help structure the exploration. (Contact us for slides with some sample questions). Examples include: How do you feel here? How much of the time do you spend here? What triggers you to be here? Where would you like to spend more time/ move to? What helps you to move there?

Ask each pair to stand up and for the first person to stand where they are right now.

Invite their partner to coach them – exploring what it's like in a quadrant and what it takes to move as well as where they want to spend more time. (Invite them to move around and, as they move, notice what's needed).

After 10 minutes, ask pairs to swap roles and repeat.

#### **Step 4: Reflection and discussion (10')**

At this point it's useful to give the group a few minutes' reflection time to note down conclusions and insights.

Facilitate a discussion about what people noticed.

We find that people say that they are in survival mode too much of the time and at risk of tipping into burnout. Also, they become aware of the need to spend more time in recharge. (I first experienced this exercise with Lucy Ryan, and she suggested that people in organisations spend about 75% of the time at work in 'survival mode' whereas elite athletes spend about 90% in recharge and 10% in thriving... I haven't seen the research data, but from my own organizational experience the principle makes sense).

#### **Step 5: Building team bounce back and support (up to 30')**

This step focuses on the whole team and ensuring team members notice and have each other's backs. Bring the team back together (ideally in a circle).

Ask team members to share what triggers them into survival and towards burnout, what others might notice them doing/ saying and any tips to help others notice early. Invite each person to make a request of the team or an individual – something that would help them to stay in thriving or move to recharge when needed.

Close the exercise with a short discussion about how the team might use this and keep paying attention to it (1 to 1 or in future team meetings).

#### **Tips**

This exercise is more impactful if participants are 'embodied' – paying attention to what they feel and notice in their bodies. You can achieve this with a short, guided mindfulness exercise where you ask people to be aware of their bodily sensations and breath (contact us if you would like an example).

When setting up coaching pairs ask people to choose someone quite different to them or that they know less well – a bi-product of this exercise is building trust.

This process also lends itself to broader discussions about leadership and organizational culture – how often do organisations operate in a way that triggers people into surviving mode? (This links well with David Rock's SCARF model and the things which neuroscience is showing activate the 'Threat' or Fight and Flight response).

Remember – this may be new territory for a team. It can be strange and uncomfortable... often there's an 'F' word in business – feelings. So, revisiting this to normalize discussion of how people really are and what they need from each other builds bounce back over time.

Alyse Ashton

**References:**

For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

For more resources linked to resilience see:

[www.mindspring.uk.com](http://www.mindspring.uk.com) – Emotions in Action A4 pads available to purchase

Maddi, S.R. (2013). Hardiness: Turning Stressful Circumstances into Growth. New York, NY: Springer.  
Why leaders don't brag about managing stress, James R Bailey HBR

Managing with the Brain in Mind – David Rock

Reduce Your Stress in Two Minutes a Day – [Greg McKeown](#) HBR

The Power of Resilience – Sam Goldstein, Ph.D. at TEDxRockCreekPark You Tube

Original Source: Developed from an exercise originally experienced with Lucy Ryan, Mindspring  
([www.mindspring.uk.com](http://www.mindspring.uk.com))

***Alyse Ashton and Richard Spence are the co-authors of the Team Health Check and draw on over 50 years' combined experience as team coaches and facilitators working with global organisations.***

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