

HOW TO TAME your temper

by Helene Vermaak

We have all lost our temper at some point. After all, we are human!. But when it becomes embarrassing to those around you and even to yourself, if you are honest, that is when you require the skills to tame your temper.

Do you lose your temper in public, at work or at home? Are you often blinded by rage? Do you make nasty statements and accusations that you later find yourself regretting?

Sometimes it's not easy to manage a roller-coaster of emotions!

Riding the rollercoaster of emotions is not only dangerous for your relationships and those around you, but once you are on it, it is not that easy to get off and calm down.

Think about this:

Forewarned is forearmed – if you can, prepare yourself beforehand for the situation you will likely handle it better. Deciding in advance how you will handle your emotions and actions can help you stay in control.

Go to the balcony – try to distance yourself psychologically from the situation that is making you angry. William Ury, co-founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project, calls this strategy “going to the balcony.” Step back from the heat of the moment, distance yourself, rise above it, and watch it objectively as if from a balcony.

There are people who just get my back-up!

Recognise your triggers – know what the buttons are that people push that sets your temper off, so that you can determine whether they are an overreaction or real.

Challenge your story – this is how our emotions work:

- **See and hear:** When something happens, we learn of it through our eyes and ears, and it enters our visual and auditory cortexes in our brain.
- **Tell a story:** We try to make sense of what's happening. Our prefrontal cortex analyses the evidence and creates a story to make sense of it all.
- **Feel:** If the story involves risk, it's sent to our amygdala, which fires up our emotions - and shuts down most of any further processing by our prefrontal cortex.



- **Act:** Our strong emotions propel us towards fight or flight - angry outbursts or escape.

Where we come unstuck is that it is the story, we tell ourselves and not the facts that result in feelings of threat and strong emotions.

What we need to remind ourselves is that our story is often faulty, and we therefore need to challenge this.

How do we do that?

Try asking yourself these two questions:

- Do I have enough facts to be certain my story is true?
- Is there any other, more positive story that can fit this set of facts?

By asking these questions, you are able to distance yourself from the story you are telling yourself. And, as soon as you introduce some doubt into your story, it stops generating strong emotions that can send you off the deep-end.



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