



5 Steps to Keeping Your Cool... Without Heating Up

--by Kathleen Randall

Companies lose up to 80% of their potential productivity because managers do not know how to deal with conflict. Kathleen Randall teaches practical ways to manage conflict with employees, customers, and family.

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Stress and conflict... conflict and stress. It's all around us... at work, at home, on vacation. What about that last committee meeting you just attended... the one that was so tense you could just feel the animosity? Or what about that family gathering you just attended ... the one that was so tense it caused you to snap at everyone around you? How tactfully did you handle those situations??

For some of us "losing our cool" comes in the form of a louder, more demanding voice and rigid body language. For others, it is internalized in the form of raised blood pressure, migraine headaches, ulcers, or, quite literally, a pain in the neck.

In our over-extended lives of constant to-do lists and day-timers, many of us are living just one step away from emotionally boiling over. We've had our buttons pushed one too many times and our gut instinct sends us into reactionary mode. We've been polite ... we've tried to contain ourselves ... but now, as the pressures mount, our natural defenses kick in and tact goes out the window.

Think back to one of those times when you lost your composure. Did losing it really get you the outcome you desired? Or did it just make you look like the one out of control? If you find yourself wondering, "How could I have handled it differently?" then the following information is for you.

There are five easy steps to remember when your mind is a BLURR and you need to keep your cool without heating up.

1. **B**reathe.

Yes, breathe ... not sigh. Whenever the human brain encounters some type of stress trigger, it often causes the body muscles to tense up. With this tension our blood pressure begins to rise in response to a perceived danger, and people do one of two things: begin breathing faster and shallower or hold their breath. Either one takes away oxygen needed for the brain to function rationally.

2. **L**isten through the emotions.

Let your emotion pass before reacting. Easier said than done, right? Your fight-or-flight mechanism just kicked in. But you are the only one who can control your reaction. Jack Canfield first introduced the equation: Event + Reaction = Outcome.

Understand what triggered you to react and what your instinctive reactions are. Was it the other person's tone of voice? Was it their choice of words? Was it their body language? Was it your perception of the situation? Each one of us needs to understand what triggers cause us to react.

3. **U**nderstand/Identify the problem/behavior... not the emotion.

Stay in the moment and carefully listen for details. Listen through their emotion. What situation (not emotion) are they actually talking about? Is there something you can quantify... some result they aren't getting... some deadline that didn't get met? Is there something that is causing them to feel a loss of control?

Charles Kettering – farmer, school teacher, mechanic, engineer, scientist, inventor, and social philosopher – once said, “A problem well stated is a problem half solved.” Beyond your emotions about the situation, what problem or behavior was the cause?

What was the effect of that problem or behavior? When you can identify this, you are on your way to finding a solution for the situation.

4. **R**educe defensive nonverbals.

First, don't take it personally. Most situations that cause us to lose our cool are generally due to our perception about how something was done, how we were treated, a lack of results, or the timeliness of the issue. When these perceptions invade our minds, our bodies instantly respond to the potential threat, whether perceived or real, and our body language tends to become more rigid and closed. So what are some practical ways to reduce defensive nonverbals?

1) Open body language: arms comfortably at your side... not crossed.

2) Regulators: use of occasional head nods to let the other person know you are actually listening.

3) Relaxed facial muscles: not a giddy smile... but not a sour scowl either.

4) Eye contact: maintain eye contact without those eye rolls.

5) Keep your voice at a conversational level without sarcasm.

5. **R**espond versus React.

Reaction is the instinctual defense mechanism occurring after the situation has happened.

Response is proactive and requires thinking ahead. Reaction is often centered in protection of self; response can choose to respect both parties. When learning to respond, take time to choose your words, vocal tone, and body language.

But what about those times when you've been blind-sided with a situation and you didn't get time to choose? Congratulations, you just found one of your triggers. Take time to learn from this event. Figure out how you would handle that situation if it happens again... because it probably will. Write it down. If processed, this experience will allow you to better respond the next time you find yourself ready to react.

Stressors are all around us. They are a natural part of life. While we can't control every situation or person that comes our way, we can control our response to those situations.

Our responses will ultimately determine our success in business as well as in life. Even more importantly, our response will determine our own state of health. So the next time a stressor pushes your buttons, remember these five easy steps, and you will be the one who keeps cool without heating up!

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