

B.U.L.L.Y.

How to Understand and Master Your Triggers

The Saber Six Foundation has teamed with Dr. Mark Goulston to create the 22-day Trigger Mastery Challenge.

Trigger Mastery is vital. You take actions you regret when acting on triggers. You hurt yourself and others, destroy your relationships, and damage your reputation.

Are your actions taking you closer to the person you want to be or further away?

When you control your triggers, you control your behavior.

When you control your behavior, you become the person you want to be.

New habits take about 21 days to form.

The ongoing tragedy that 22 veterans reportedly die by suicide daily inspired the 22-day challenge. Let's get started.



Dr. Mark Goulston

The Saber Six Foundation's Trigger Mastery Challenge is to control your triggers for 22 days. Here's the challenge:

1. Put the bracelet on your wrist.
2. Whenever you act out on a trigger, put the bracelet on your other wrist and return to Day 1.
3. You master the challenge after 22 consecutive days of controlling your triggers. You'll get a certificate and the joy of knowing you are becoming an ever-better version of yourself.
4. Spread the word, be a Trigger Mastery mentor.



What is Triggering?

Triggering means you respond impulsively to a stimulus that activates your amygdala, your fight-or-flight instinct (trigger).

I prefer “triggering” to “being triggered” because the latter, passive, construction, implies that you’re not in charge of your behavior. You are. You cannot control what activates your trigger, but you can control whether you holster it or let it hijack you.



Controlling your Triggers is a 3-step process:

TRIGGERED – DOWNSHIFT – REFRAME

STEP 1:

Triggered: Say to yourself that you are triggering.

STEP 2:

Downshift: Create space between your trigger and your action.

STEP 3:

Reframe the situation so your actions are constructive instead of destructive.

[Dr. Mark Goulston provided this process to The Saber Six Foundation.]

Types of Triggers:

A Trigger activates your amygdala, which controls your fight-or-flight instincts. The amygdala hijack occurs when you act on your trigger.

Common reactions to being triggered include yelling, engaging in physical violence, getting depressed, taking high-risk behaviors, self-medicating with alcohol or drugs, and self-harm.

People tend to experience five triggers, forming the acronym BULLY

Bad Behavior. Someone misbehaves. They cut you off in traffic, scold you for some alleged offense, or act loud and obnoxious, and you feel like retaliating.

Unexpected sounds or actions. Loud or high-pitched noises or sudden movements can make you fear an immediate threat to your safety, so your pulse raises, and you want to act on aggression.

Loss of Control. You lash out because you feel you cannot control essential aspects of your life.

Let down. You feel let down by someone or believe they've performed poorly, so you yell or threaten them to get their attention. Alternatively, you get angry and beat yourself up or self-medicate because you feel let down by yourself because you violated your standards.

You're always wrong; not valued. You feel anxiety, impulse to retreat, or numb the pain because you believe that you are constantly screwing up or others think that about you, so you feel that you are a burden to others.

Triggered:

When you feel yourself triggering, you may experience a physical reaction brought on by mental or emotional stress.

For example, your heartbeat may increase, you might feel flush, and you could begin sweating.

You will feel primary emotions like fear, anger, anxiety, or disgust.

It's common to think that you are "being triggered" but that puts you in a powerless position.

Say to yourself, "I'm feeling triggered," or imagine a person you trust saying, "Hey, you are triggering."

Downshift:

Downshift regains control by slowing the time between the trigger and your response.

Label your feeling: "I'm feeling anger over what this person just said," "That loud noise recreated feelings of fear," "I'm feeling anxiety about all of these problems."

By labeling your feelings, you dissipate them, making them tangible and manageable. “I’m not going to let someone’s bad behavior control me,” “I’m not in that situation anymore,” “I cannot solve everything at once, so I need to focus on the next right thing.”

Breathe intentionally, go for a walk, put down the phone, and get away from the keyboard until you’ve reframed the situation.

Reframe:

You want to reframe the situation so your response is constructive instead of destructive.

Bad Behavior: You never know what the other person is going through.

Instead of, “This guy’s a jerk, and I’m going to teach him a lesson.”

Try:

“Something bad probably happened to him, and he’s taking it out on the world. I don’t let bad behavior control me.”

“Something you said triggered me, and I got distracted. It seemed important. Could you say it again in a calmer voice so I can listen?”

Unexpected Sounds or Actions: You aren’t in a traumatic situation anymore; that movement was not a threat.

Instead of yelling at someone or taking out your aggression on a person or thing,

Try:

Imagine someone you trust telling you, “It’s not a threat. It’ll be ok.”

Breathe intentionally, use headphones (if the noise is recurring), or leave the area.

Loss of Control: You lash out or get depressed when things don’t go your way.

Instead of complaining, “Here we go again / this ALWAYS happens to me, etc.”

Try:

“Stop acting like a victim; this is happening FOR you so you can build your resilience muscles. “I can’t control what others do, but I can control my behavior. I’m in total control of my values and standards.” “I can’t fix it all at once; I’m going to do the next right thing.”

Let down: You criticize someone because they messed up.

Instead of “What the \$%&!@# were you thinking!”

Try:

Count to 10 (or at least 3); stay away from the keyboard. Ask, “How will you do it better next time?”

You’re Always Wrong. You get frustrated and depressed that everything you touch turns out poorly.

Instead of, “I suck at everything, I’m better off dead.”

Try

“Do you really believe that?” You’re human so cut yourself some slack. “How will I do it better next time?”

Create your Support network. Avoid negative people or complainers who suck away your energy. Avoid people who tell you that you can’t do it.

Hang instead with people who cheer you on, want what’s best for you, and are willing to tell you the truth.

Take a quick inventory. Who are the five people you spend time with the most?

If they are not people who uplift you, swap them for ones who do.

Take a selfie and send a quick note to those people thanking them for helping you become a better version of yourself. Appreciate the good people instead of wasting energy being ticked off by those who aren’t.

You’ll find that associating with uplifting people makes you more uplifting, too.



Test your Trigger Management

1) What triggers you frequently? _____

2) Based on what you've learned, what kind of trigger(s) happen the most?

- Bad Behavior
- Unexpected sounds or actions
- Loss of Control
- Let Down
- You're Always Wrong

3) What might you say or do to holster your trigger in these situations?

- "Give the person some grace"?
- "Breathe; Count to 10; Leave
- Do the next right thing
- "How can you do it better next time?"
- "Do you really believe that? How will you do it better next time?"

4) Plan of Action:

"Whenever _____ badgers to me, I will say, " _____"
_____."

Videos

-  **The 3 Steps to Mastering Your Triggers**
-  **B.U.L.L.Y The 5 Main Triggers**
-  **Mastering your Triggers: an interview with Dr. Mark Goulston**
-  **Keys to success in the Challenge**

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