

Internal Self Control

*A session from
the Rx CD System*



Internal Self Control:

The ability to maintain rational and objective actions when faced with a stressful and emotional situation.

Why is this skill important?

Internal Self Control is a measure of your self-composure in difficult situations—do you think and act objectively, or do you behave impulsively and emotionally? If you think and act objectively and calmly, you will be much more likely to manage a difficult situation effectively, finding a solution that benefits everyone.

People who have good Internal Self Control are comfortable in handling an emotional employee, an argument in a staff meeting, or a confrontational client. They are able to distance themselves from the emotions involved and logically deal with each situation as it happens. This doesn't mean that they have no internal conflict—no emotional response—but it does mean that their actions aren't governed by their own emotional response.

In contrast, people who have poor Internal Self Control may have difficulty accomplishing this separation. Instead of recognizing their emotions, keeping them separate from their actions and maintaining composure, they may allow their own emotions to lead their actions. In doing so, they will no longer be MANAGING a situation, but will instead have become caught up in it.

Most of us have certain triggers—things that make us feel like we are going to lose control. For some people, confrontational situations have this effect, while for others, it might be interacting with someone who is disappointed in them for some reason. There are any number of reasons why a perfectly sane, happy individual would react with a lack of Internal Self Control. But what separates people with good Internal Self Control from people with poor Internal Self Control is that people with good Internal Self Control know their triggers.

If you KNOW that making people angry or disappointed or sad will cause you to overreact, you can monitor situations for those triggers. If you are conscious of the fact that you are in a triggering situation, you can manage your reactions better.

For example, if a customer starts to get angry with you, and you know that that situation will typically make you very upset, you can stop yourself from overreacting. Your own actions will stay calmer and you will be more likely to keep the situation manageable while finding a reasonable solution to the problem. You may still feel very angry or upset, and you may need to vent those emotions later, but your interaction with the customer will remain calm and as productive as possible.

You DO have the power to change your own reactions, and you DO have the power to be the "bigger man," keeping control of your emotions and managing stressful situations.

What are skills associated with Internal Self Control?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Internal Self Control:

- Thinks and acts objectively, even in difficult situations.
- Is able to separate his or her own emotional reactions from the current situation.
- Listens and observes objectively and respectfully to other people, regardless of how other people are treating him or her.
- Is understanding and calm in the face of confrontation or adversity.
- Seeks the most objective, reasonable solution to arguments or other difficult situations.
- Recognizes his or her own triggers and manages his or her reactions to trigger events.

How do you develop your own skills in Internal Self Control?

- Get (or stay) physically fit. Exercise is a great stress reliever, and a fit and relaxed body is more ready to handle the rush of stress hormones that start when we are "under fire."
- Take advantage of support networks to maintain perspective on your stressors. Talk with trusted friends outside of the workplace about your concerns.
- Find people with similar roles or responsibilities to yours in your company, and arrange to meet with them to brainstorm about problematic issues.
- Once or twice a year, brainstorm with co-workers or staff about potential crisis situations that might arise. Try to make a "crisis plan" for the worst potential problems.
- If unexpected crisis events occur, keep calm and gather facts to evaluate the situation carefully before reacting too quickly
- Discuss difficult situations with your supervisor, a co-worker, or someone else whose integrity and opinions you trust.
- If appropriate, use humor to lighten tension in a meeting or discussion. Be VERY careful not to use inappropriate or personally demeaning humor.
- Pay attention to other people's reactions, as well as to your own. If you can see that someone's body language is becoming uncomfortable, or if you recognize that someone is getting agitated, you can manage the situation better.
- Prepare yourself for potentially difficult situations. If you know you have an

appointment with a difficult customer or supplier, psyche yourself up for it. If you know you are going to disappoint an employee, prepare yourself ahead for their reactions.

- If you are preparing for a difficult situation, be clear what your own expectations are. What is your best-case scenario? What is the least you will settle for?
- If you find yourself getting emotional, find a way to temporarily excuse yourself from the situation—even just a moment "looking for a file" or "trying to call a manager" can give you the time to take a deep breath and regain your perspective.
- If you really can't manage your emotions in a specific situation, bring in a third party to help you sort out the situation more calmly.
- It may sound trite, but the "count to ten" rule really works! If you find yourself getting angry with someone, stop yourself from responding until you have calmly completed counting to ten!
- Present and defend your point of view in a diligent and calm manner without seeming defensive.
- Try to imagine the other person's (or people's) point of view. Sometimes if you put yourself in their shoes you can enable yourself to be more empathetic, seeing options and perspectives you didn't see yourself.
- Practice your own negotiation skills. Take a course in negotiation or mediation. Read books on the subject.
- If a discussion has gotten unexpectedly heated, see if you can suggest that the participants regroup at a later time once people have calmed down a bit.
- Keep your own sense of humor. Very few things that you do at work are truly "life or death," and there is almost always a reasonable solution to any difficult problem.

Internal Self Control Activities

Activity 1: Self-Analysis

1. What was the last time you "lost it"—in other words, what was the last time you felt like you were losing control of your thought processes and reacting only based on emotions?

2. How did you feel?

3. Why did you get so emotionally stressed?

4. Do events like this one typically cause you to lose it?

5. Why do you think so? Or, why do you think not—why was this situation different?

6. What could you have done differently?

Activity 2: Learning from Others

Is there someone you know who always seems in control? Someone who seems to manage every situation, never letting the situation manage him or her?

Make an appointment to talk with that person. Find out how he/she perceives him/herself. Ask how he/she handles stressful situations. How does he/she manage to control impulses and act rationally?

See what you can learn from this person. Write down 5-10 things that this person tells you, and see if you can implement those things in YOUR daily life.

Activity 3: Practice

In the next stressful situation you are in, monitor your own behavior as if you are an independent observer. If you find yourself getting agitated or stressed, talk to yourself silently. Encourage yourself to calm down and approach the issue logically.

Learn relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, stretching, or guided or unguided meditation. Be sure to make time in your day for practicing whatever technique you choose. Be especially sure to use your technique next time you are in a stressful situation.

Activity 4: What If?

1. What if you were a customer service person at a major department store?
A customer is getting angry with you because you are unable to give a cash refund for a return over thirty days old. The customer has become confrontational, and has called you a very unpleasant name. What should you do? How can you handle the situation?
2. What if you were a doctor at a regional hospital? Your elderly patient has been admitted for a stomach pain, and you have told him that he requires surgery for a ruptured kidney. The patient has gotten emotional with you, expressing anger and dismay that he needs surgery. What should you do? How can you handle the situation?
3. What if you are a salesperson for a wholesale plumbing supply company?
A contractor who is a regular customer is frustrated because a large order he placed isn't in. Even though you had warned him that the custom order might take several weeks, he is still getting angry with you because his client is impatient with him. What should you do? How can you handle the situation?