What do you do when someone jumps in front of you at the deli counter, cuts you off on the freeway or takes credit for your work? How you address these and similar situations constitutes your emotional intelligence (EQ).

"If you wish you had behaved differently in any of those situations, you may be a victim of 'emotional hijacking,'" says Adele B. Lynn, president of the Adele Lynn Leadership Group in Belle Vernon, Pa., and author of The EQ Difference: A Powerful Plan for Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work.

An emotional hijacking is when the rational, thinking part of your brain is bypassed because of your intense emotions. When this happens, you're so emotionally fired up you can't think or solve problems.

How high is your EQ?

We all know that IQ measures a person's intelligence. But what exactly is EQ? Ms. Lynn defines emotional intelligence as your ability to manage yourself and your relationships.

Why do you think employers interview prospective employees when they could easily spend less time just testing them for their intelligence?

Here's why: In interviews, employers are looking for personality traits. When doing interviews, managers can experience how people communicate, determine their personality and whether they'll fit in with the rest of the staff.

This is important, as one employee who can't get along can disrupt an entire workplace. At your office, you may know some very intelligent workers who can't get along with people, and whose emotions easily get out of hand. Their inability to handle their emotions makes them destructive employees, in spite of their intelligence.

Start with yourself

You don't have control over other people's behavior, but you can learn to control your own. Therefore, you need to start by raising your own EQ.

A notebook is an important tool for raising your EQ. Writing down your reactions to emotional situations will help you become aware of your behavior and think rationally.

In The EQ Difference, Ms. Lynn discusses seven steps to improve emotional intelligence. Three of those steps are:

Observe

"Pay attention to your emotions. Try to observe while you're 'in the moment,' especially during conflict situations," says Ms. Lynn.

Observe both your feelings and reactions in difficult or stressful situations. Are you thinking only of yourself, or can you empathize with the other person? A person with a high EQ is able to think not only of his own needs, but also empathize with others.

Observe how others react in their words and body language or behavior.
Interpret

"Try to determine your triggers and other indicators that prompt you to lose your cool or become fearful," says Ms. Lynn. When you have intense negative emotions, they're usually related to your fears.

Write down any fears you believe may have triggered your reaction. Then go over them one by one and determine which, if any, are realistic in this situation. Most fears come from past experiences, so take this one step further and try to remember when this fear started. When you analyze your fears, you take away their power to control your emotions.

Pause

Engage in a long pause to help you regain your intentions. Without the pause, you may react without thinking. Many people avoid pauses because they feel uncomfortable when there's a silence. It's OK to feel uncomfortable and take that long pause anyway.

Next, when by yourself, write in your notebook what you observed, your interpretation and how you will handle a similar situation next time.

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