

## RELEASE THE TRIGGERS IN YOUR LIFE

**W**e all have triggers. It might be your spouse's "mhm" when you tell her you had to work late. It might be your coworker's open discussion of your fashion sense. Maybe stepping on the kids' toys riles you up. Hey, Legos® hurt!

Triggers are just the signals our brain sends us to say, "I have an issue with that." More often than not, our triggers are tiny little things. But when something or somebody pulls them, we go off like a twelve-pound cannon.

We'll even admit, "You know, when you say that, it immediately ruins my day." What we're saying is that there are things that happen in the world that can turn our mood upside down on a dime. That mood change then pushes our behavior in a certain direction. Triggers don't just make us feel differently, they make us act differently, too.

Negative events can trigger a cascade of negative thoughts and emotions. They flash in and out of our brains so fast that it's difficult to process them, much less alter their course or bring them to a halt. Sometimes events trigger our deepest anxieties. "Does my husband really love me? Is he mad at me? Am I terrible parent?" The list goes on.

And because we think in storyboards, our brains start creating stories that, true or not, affect how we feel and act. There's almost always an accompanying thought or series of thoughts or beliefs that we use to fill in the blanks when our moods turn sour. Like, "Oh my gosh, she must be cheating on me," or "I just know they're laughing at that stain on my shirt."

It takes a deep breath, a step back, an analysis of the situation, and a strong commitment to realize that certain events are triggering certain emotions and changes in our behavior. Maintaining an awareness

of our triggers and how they affect our thinking is challenging, but if we do it right, we stand a good chance of conquering our emotions and learning to think the best thoughts about a situation before we react.

You need your best thinking. I say it all the time. And that thinking is an active process, not the typical passive process we take. We look at our thoughts like we are watching a movie; we sit there and watch all of this unfold before our eyes in high definition color and Dolby® sound. Our thoughts should be like a conversation or debate with a friend. We should be on our toes, actively challenging things we think are absurd (*because they probably are*).

One of our greatest weaknesses is that our “thought life” (that world inside our brains that cooks up rational and irrational thoughts alike) gets relegated to this unimportant status, and we can’t figure out why we struggle so much.

**We’ve got to put a spotlight on our “thought life” and figure out what kind of changes we need to make to it.** That’s when we stop doing our worst thinking and start doing our best thinking.