

Pause, Don't Pounce: Emotional Intelligence at Work

Master Your Reactions. Improve Your Interactions.

LUNCH & LEARN

SECTION 1

Session Overview

> "Have you ever wondered why you react one way in a situation… while someone else responds completely differently?"

This Is NOT

- ☒ A personality test
- ☒ A therapy session

This IS

- ☒ Practical workplace skills
- ☒ Communication awareness
- ☒ Emotional regulation
- ☒ Relationship management

You'll Leave With Tools To:

- Pause before reacting
- Separate facts from stories
- Respond intentionally under pressure
- Navigate situations with low-EI individuals
- Build EI skills that improve communication, collaboration, conflict management, and self-awareness

SECTION 2

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and respond to emotions — both your own and those of others. It's a learnable skill that shapes every workplace and personal interactions.



Self-Awareness

Recognizing emotions, understanding triggers, and knowing how your mood affects others



Self-Regulation

Managing reactions, responding intentionally, and staying professional under pressure



Empathy

Understanding others' perspectives and listening beyond the words being said



Social Skills

Communication, collaboration, and effective conflict management



Motivation

Internal drive, persistence, and a genuine growth mindset

EI is not about never getting emotional. It's about recognizing what's happening internally and **choosing how you respond externally.**

SECTION 3

Why EI Matters: The Business Cost of Low EI

Low emotional intelligence often shows up **operationally before we recognize it emotionally.** It doesn't only affect people — it directly affects performance, culture, and results. It actually slows work down.

People & Culture Signals

- Disengagement & quiet quitting
- High turnover
- Employees afraid to speak up
- Defensive feedback conversations
- Unresolved conflict

Operational Signals

- Avoided difficult conversations
- Slower decision-making
- Unproductive meetings
- Collaboration breakdowns
- Misaligned priorities

💬 **Discussion:** Think about the best leaders or coworkers you've worked with. What did it feel like to be on their team?
People rarely remember the smartest person in the room. They remember how someone made them feel!

SECTION 4

Self-Awareness: Facts vs. Stories

Sometimes the event is small. The story we build around it becomes enormous. Our brains are incredibly good at filling in blanks — sometimes a little too good."

The Amber Scenario

"I walk in and say good morning to Amber. She doesn't look up, doesn't respond — just grunts. Immediately my brain starts spinning: What did I do? Why is she upset with me? Did I miss something?"

Notice how quickly a simple moment turns into an entire internal narrative — one that may have no basis in reality whatsoever.



SECTION 4 — EXERCISE

Redline the Story Exercise

This two-pass exercise helps you strip away assumption and interpretation — leaving only what is actually, verifiably true.

1

Step 1: Write It All Out

Put the full scenario on paper — emotions, assumptions, internal dialogue, everything. No filter. Let it be ugly.

2

Pass 1: Cross Out What You Don't Know

Strike anything unconfirmed: ~~She was angry at me~~ · ~~She ignored me on purpose~~ · ~~She wanted to embarrass me~~

3

Pass 2: Keep Only Verifiable Facts

Who? What happened? When? What was said? What was observed? Nothing more.

✅ **What Was Actually True:** "I said good morning to Amber. She did not respond." That's it. Everything else was a story.

The Rest of Amber's Story

What I didn't know: Amber's dog got loose before work. She chased it down the road in the rain, came home soaked, changed clothes, still needed gas, then spilled coffee on herself on the way in. She arrived late, frustrated, overwhelmed — and still processing her own morning. **Amber wasn't upset with me. But my brain immediately made it about me.**

In My Lane

- Facts I can observe
- My own actions
- My responses and questions

Not My Lane

- Mind reading
- Assumed motives
- Interpretations treated as facts
- Assumed intentions

Our brains naturally fill in missing information. Emotional intelligence helps us slow down long enough to **question the story before reacting.**



SECTION 5

Stress Tolerance & The Full Glass

Most emotional reactions are not caused by one single moment. Usually it's the **accumulation** of stress, pressure, interruptions, and emotional load over time. The fuller our glass... the smaller the trigger needed to overflow.
Think of a glass filled just above the rim — surface tension holds it together. Then add one more drop. Everything spills over.
People work exactly like this.



Common Workplace Stressors That Fill the Glass

- Candidate ghosting
- Attendance issues
- Payroll concerns
- Client escalations
- Multiple urgent requests
- Feeling behind on everything

Building Stress Tolerance

The state of your internal capacity shapes everything about how you show up at work — your decisions, your communication, your patience. Building tolerance means creating space before the glass overflows.



- 💬 **Reflection:** What lowers YOUR surface tension? What habits, routines, or moments genuinely help you release pressure before it overflows?



SECTION 6

Empathy & Emotional Intelligence

Empathy is a core component of EI because it helps us understand the emotional experience of others — instead of reacting only from our own perspective. But empathy is often misunderstood.

Empathy IS

- Understanding someone's perspective
- Listening fully and without interruption
- Recognizing emotions as real and valid
- Creating genuine human connection

Empathy Is NOT

- Agreement with what's being said
- Excusing problematic behavior
- Removing accountability
- Abandoning appropriate boundaries

In Practice: Employee: "I'm frustrated my hours were short." → Empathy: "I understand why that feels frustrating." → Boundary: "Let's review the time records together."You can hold both — simultaneously.

SECTION 7

When Others Have Low EI

You can manage your own reactions — but eventually, someone else will react poorly. Your job isn't to fix them. It's to stay regulated so the conversation can still move forward productively.

Name it internally, not out loud: *"This person is flooded right now."* Their emotions are information — not a personal attack. Your regulation protects the conversation.

1	Someone Raises Their Voice "I can hear this is important. Let's slow down and work through it together."
2	Someone Shuts Down Don't push. "Let's take a few minutes and come back to this when we're both ready."
3	You're Blamed Unfairly Don't defend immediately. "Tell me more about what happened from your side."
4	Email Comes In Hot Don't reply right away. Draft your response, wait, re-read before sending.
5	Someone Keeps Venting Acknowledge once, then redirect: "What do you need to move forward?"

Key Message: You do not have to match someone else's emotional intensity to solve the problem.

SECTION 9

Practical Tools: Methods You Can Use Today

The STOP Method

S — Stop

Pause before reacting. Create a deliberate gap.

T — Think

What is actually happening? Will I cringe at my reaction later?

O — Observe

What am I feeling? What story am I telling myself?

P — Proceed

Choose your response intentionally and with purpose.

The LAER Method

L — Listen

Fully, without preparing your reply while they speak.

A — Acknowledge

Reflect back what you heard before responding.

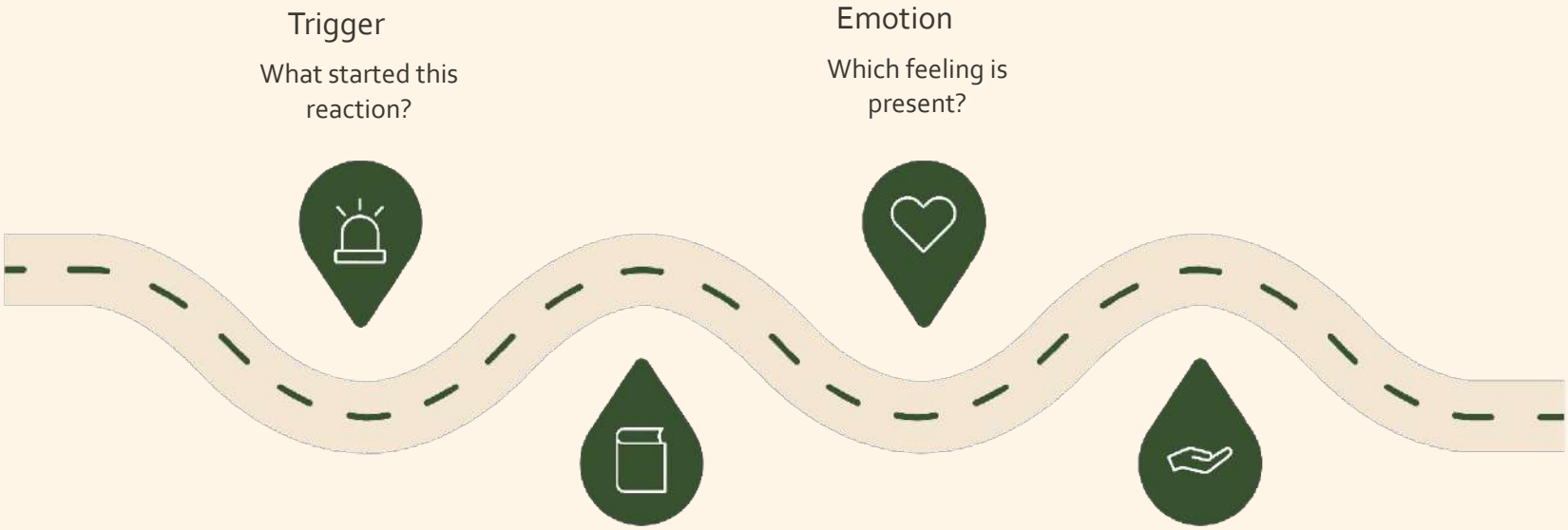
E — Explore

Ask clarifying questions before assuming anything.

R — Respond

Only after you actually understand what's being said.

The Pause, Don't Pounce Framework



Most people move from trigger straight to reaction. **Emotional intelligence lives in the pause between the two.**

SECTION 8

Scenarios & Application

Let's put these tools to work. Use the EI frameworks we've covered — facts vs. stories, the glass, empathy, and high-EI responses — to work through these real-world situations.

Scenario 1: Employee Upset About Being Let Go

01

What emotions are present on *both* sides of this conversation?

02

What assumptions might each person be making about the other?

03

What facts do we know vs. what stories may be getting created?

04

What does a high-EI response actually sound like in this moment?

Scenario 2: Client Frustrated by Attendance Issues

01

Walk through the client's perspective — what are they feeling and why?

02

Walk through the employee's perspective — what is their experience?

03

Where does your internal team fit in this dynamic?

04

Where is empathy needed — without removing accountability?

Your Three-Step Reminder

Pause.

When emotions rise, Pause
Create the gap between trigger and reaction.

Check the Story.

Separate facts from the narrative your brain created.

Choose the Response.

Respond with intention — not just reaction.

SECTION 10

Key Takeaways

You will still get frustrated. Other people will still react emotionally. Difficult situations will still happen.

The goal of emotional intelligence is not perfection. The goal is **awareness** — and awareness compounds over time into a genuine, lasting skill.



Recognize Emotions

Notice what's happening internally — in yourself and in others — before it drives your behavior.



Understand Them

Ask where the emotion is coming from. Separate the facts from the story your brain constructed.



Manage Intentionally

Use STOP, LAER, Pause and the redline exercise to choose responses that serve the outcome you want.



Help Others Feel Heard

Lead with empathy — without sacrificing accountability or appropriate boundaries.



Move Work Forward

High-EI individuals don't just manage emotions — they channel them into better outcomes for everyone.

SECTION 11

Take the Assessment & Q&A

Like any skill, emotional intelligence can be developed over time with awareness and consistent practice. A free assessment is a great starting point to understand where you are today.

Free EI Assessment

Take a free Emotional Intelligence assessment through Mind Quotient to benchmark your current EI and identify areas for growth.

Reflection Prompts

- What is one situation where you want to respond differently after today?
- What is one thing you want to do differently going forward?

❓ **Questions?** This is your time. No question is too small — if you're thinking it, someone else in the room is too.

SECTION 12

Final Thoughts

> "You can't always control the situation. You can't always control other people. But you can learn to slow down long enough to choose your response."

That choice — made in the pause between trigger and reaction — is where emotional intelligence lives. And it's a choice you can practice, strengthen, and build every day.

