

## Reaching Your Goals through Everyday Conscious Choices

By Michelle LaBrosse, CCPM, PMP®, PMI-ACP, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning

Each one of us starts with the best intentions: to eat well, exercise, do our best work at our jobs, and get along with our co-workers. Unfortunately, those good intentions don't always translate into actually doing what we say we'll do. Why is this? In this month's Know How Network, we explore the answers to this question and how to align our actions with our intentions.

Often, impediments to our success come in the form of what we here at Cheetah Learning call "triggers" - these are the everyday disruptions that mentally or emotionally distract us from what we intend to accomplish. You've prepared for your project team meeting with a detailed agenda, and several team members show up late. You arrive at work with the intention of starting right away on your most important task, and you discover your email inbox flooded with "urgent" requests. You present a proposal for a new project, and unexpectedly come up against a lot of pushback from other stakeholders.

What is your typical response to these kinds of "triggers?" For many of us, triggers push us into making choices that aren't fully conscious or intentional; that is, we *react* rather than *act* with purpose. You may lash out at a co-worker, neglect other work you need to do, or find yourself stress-eating. After engaging in these behaviors, we often feel guilty and unfulfilled. "Letting off steam" rarely makes us feel better, and can instead have the opposite effect: of making us feel like we aren't in control of our own actions or emotions.

Fortunately, *reacting* to triggering events isn't our only option. With practice, we can develop the skill of making conscious choices about how to *act* when confronted with triggers. Here are some tips for making conscious choices in response to triggering events that Cheetah has developed over years of helping students prepare for the anxiety-inducing Project Management Professional (PMP®) Exam:

1. **Identify what "triggers" you.** We may often feel blindsided by triggering events, but if we step back from a minute, we can see that some of these triggers are fairly predictable and routine. There are likely one or more of your co-workers who you can always count on to be late, no matter how many reminder emails you send about the upcoming meeting. Acknowledging the probability that these co-workers will show up late again to your next meeting is the first step in preparing to react to this triggering event more intentionally.
2. **Recognize and accept that you are being "triggered."** Now you're in the meeting, and sure enough, your "usual suspects" come in 10 minutes late with their predictable apologies and excuses. And predictably, you feel annoyed. Recognize and accept that feeling.
3. **Breathe.** Deep, calm breaths help us reach a state of calm focus that prepares us to make conscious choices about how to respond to triggers.
4. **Identify others' positive intentions.** If the behavior of someone else is the triggering event (and this is often the case), take a minute to acknowledge the other person's positive intention that led up to their actions. As the saying goes, we often judge ourselves by our intentions but others by their actions. Judging others by their intentions opens up new possibilities for understanding and empathizing with others whose actions trigger us.
5. **Find a productive way to move forward.** We don't have control over all the triggering events that happen in our lives. We do, however, have control over how we respond. After acknowledging that you are being triggered and recognizing that others, like you, start out with good intentions, you are in a great position to decide which actions will produce the outcomes you ultimately hope for. In the case of your team members showing up late to the meeting, rather than chewing them out in front of everyone during the meeting, you might pause to ask yourself: what can I do right now to make this the most productive meeting anyway? How might I most effectively communicate with the late team members to let them know their tardiness is unacceptable?

When we act consciously rather than simply react when we find ourselves in triggering situations, we influence *ourselves* to act according our best intentions. This positive self-influence brings us a feeling of deep personal satisfaction and pride that is far more rewarding than the reactive behaviors we justify as a way to “let off steam.” While these behaviors may feel good in the moment, they do not help us achieve the long-term, sustainable happiness that comes from making conscious choices.

To learn more about making conscious choices in your professional and personal life to achieve lasting happiness, consider taking Cheetah Learning’s 30-PDU online [Happiness Project course](#). Learn more at [www.cheetahlearning.com](http://www.cheetahlearning.com).

#### **About the Author:**



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the author of the Cheetah Success Series, and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 50,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Michelle also developed the [Cheetah Certified Project Manager \(CCPM\)](#) program based on Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality profiling to help students master how to use their unique strengths for learning, doing projects, and negotiating. CCPM graduates are able to choose the right projects and complete those projects “cheetah fast” based on their personality. They also learn how to leverage others’ strengths which significantly improves overall project team performance. When an employer has a cadre of CCPMs on staff, they achieve whatever they set out to achieve in record time. This is why over 90% of Cheetah’s clients experience an increase in both profitability and revenue within the first year of retaining Cheetah Learning for their Project Management training needs.

Honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle is recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.