
The Almond Effect ® in action when you're working

Imagine you're in a strategy meeting at work. Without warning, and in front of your team, your manager questions whether you've thought through the implications of your recommendations in the report the meeting is considering. You've been working on it for three weeks straight, you're tired, and now you're suddenly embarrassed in front of your team. Without stopping to think, you respond: "I've spent the last three weeks of my life not having a life, focusing 100% on these issues. Do you honestly think I wouldn't have thought about what I'm recommending?"

The other people in the meeting squirm, and moments later, you regret this potentially CLM (career limiting move). You wish you'd just drawn a deep breath, and taken the time to respond in a calmer manner, but instead, you experienced The Almond Effect ®. Your amygdala heard the words from the manager, interpreted them as a threat to your standing with your team, and sent you straight into survival mode, which this time was 'fight'.

Or maybe you're working in a call centre. It's been a long shift, and you're almost ready to go home. Suddenly a call comes in, and the customer shouts: "You're an idiot! Why are you always trying to steal from me? You're just a thief and a racist!" Your instant reaction is to shout back: 'Don't you dare speak to me like that', and then it's on. Ultimately, the customer takes their account elsewhere, and your supervisor threatens you with dismissal. It's a thoroughly horrible experience that could have been avoided if only you'd been able to manage The Almond Effect ®. If only you'd been able to stay cool when provoked, and stop your amygdala from responding to a wrongly perceived threat, rushing into survival mode, and causing you to fight back.

The Almond Effect ® in action at home

Can you relate to this? You arrive home late because of unrealistic work deadlines that had to be met. You have a headache, and the kids are fighting. There's a letter from the bank advising that your mortgage repayments are behind and attracting penalties, and then your partner arrives home, and asks: "What's for dinner?" You just let fly: "Get your own !@#\$ dinner. Why do I always have to cook? When do you ever help? Why didn't you check with the bank about the repayments?" And suddenly, you're in a full-scale argument which leads to tears, hurtful things being said that weren't meant, and an awful, tense atmosphere that lasts throughout the evening. The Almond Effect ® has ruined your night.

Imagine if you'd been able to pause for a second before over-reacting to the innocent 'what's for dinner' question – especially as your partner often cooks, shares the household chores, and didn't know that the mortgage repayments were behind. Instead, you've been caught out by your amygdala, which is really responding to the fear of losing the house, and the additional financial burden that the penalties will mean. The logical response would be to talk it through calmly with your partner, and work out how to deal with the challenge, but the fight/flight mechanism has kicked in instead. You need some Reaction Management strategies.

It's a 'Mindfield'

Our brains are hard-wired to resist or fight any threats to survival. When we respond to threats, we're experiencing the emotion of fear, which can be expressed in the following ways: alarm, shock, horror, terror, panic, hysteria, mortification, anxiety, nervousness, tenseness, uneasiness, apprehension, worry, distress, or dread. (Parrott, W. (2001), Emotions in Social Psychology, Psychology Press, Philadelphia)

Neurobiologists have shown, using MRI and CT scans, that rational, logical decision-making is inextricably intertwined with emotions. In fact, human beings are primarily emotional and secondarily rational, so emotions call the shots in business and in life. Unless we accept and address this reality, both at home and at work, we will always be at risk of The Almond Effect ® catching us off guard.

The Almond Effect ® creates a 'Mindfield' that, if we do not develop and practise strategies for working on it, will catch us out in relationships, at work, and in many everyday ways. Recognising when you are experiencing The Almond Effect ® will have a profound impact on your work lives as leaders, change managers, team members and service providers. It will be equally powerful for you as spouses, parents, and friends.

What follows are some Reaction Management strategies and tips for taking control of your Almond Effect ® when it is triggered at the wrong time.

Managing The Almond Effect ® will make a difference to your life, both at home and at work. Whether you're already a leader, aspiring to be one, in customer service, or just wanting to understand and manage your emotional reactions better, I think you'll enjoy reading and working with the tips in this e-book.