

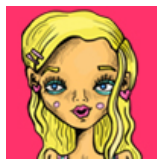
## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REACTION AND A RESPONSE

What do you imagine is the difference between a reaction and a response? Take a moment to think of at least one thing. Don't worry, we'll wait for you while you do. Any time now. Are you ready? Okay, let's continue then.

Currently, you may be forming habits (creating strong **synapses**) according to this plan:

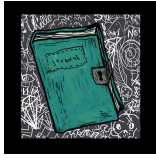


When something happens (an action or a situation), you react to it, and BOOM! Synapses are created. You see a flower and you pick it. You see a mud puddle and you jump in it. You don't think about it because you are just reacting in a way that expresses who you are. Look how Taylor reacts and expresses herself to the world:



Taylor came rushing out of the girls locker room (AKA: her office) in an effort to find Julie to tell her that Timmy, Julie's brother, was just totally dissed by Matt, his supposed best friend. Timmy likes a girl named Sally, but Matt thinks Sally is a loser and laughs behind Timmy's back every time Timmy talks with her. How does Taylor know all of this? (And how does she keep all those names straight?) Rumor mill of course. So it must be true. Since she IS the actual rumor mill herself. As Taylor rounds the library cubicle and slides into the water cooler, she trips a feeble-looking 6<sup>th</sup> grader, (feels no remorse), flips her hair, plasters a smile on her face, raises her eyebrows, grabs Julie by the wrists and squeals, "Matt is SOOO not a great friend to Timmy." (Oh! How exciting for Taylor - bad news to spread about other people.) Her brain is spinning with enthusiasm. Julie grabs her by the wrist, stares her right in the eyes and says, "Why don't you find someone who cares?" Taylor's reaction to this? She stomps away thinking only about what she will tell Michelle about what Julie just said. (Did you keep that straight? There will be a quiz later on who Timmy is. JK;))

Taylor is very impulsive. She reacts to things without a moment of hesitation or contemplation. She is not fully aware of the consequences. This is a classic Action – Reaction scenario.



**PIT STOP:** Do you know anyone like Taylor? **yes/no**  
Are you like Taylor? **yes/no/not sure**  
How do you feel about the way Taylor reacted?

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Something more empowering happens when you become **AWARE** of your actions. You begin to live **PURPOSEFULLY**, and you learn to **CONTROL** the formation of the new tracks (synapses) in your brain, like this (see orange box):

What's the big deal? What's the main difference between a reaction and a response? A reaction is not thought-out. It is impulsive. A response requires responsibility and well thought-out decisions.

This book is about finding the time between the action and the reaction in order to become aware of your thoughts and feelings so that you can choose how to respond in any given situation. Once you figure out how to hold your tongue, label your emotions, think, take a deep breath, listen quietly or sit patiently, then your reactions will turn into more admired, respected, thoughtful and appreciated responses.

**ACTION** CREATES  
**TIME TO THINK,**  
**FEEL, CHOOSE**  
LEADING TO A  
**RESPONSE**

How does this happen? How do you go from a reaction to a response? As luck would have it, you are about to learn the four steps toward a response. By the way, when you finish picking that hangnail, you might want to pay huge attention to the four steps toward creating habits that speak to who you are. Those hangnails are nasty, but a bad habit that destroys friendships, breaks dates or fails algebra is nastier – especially since it can be changed. You are about to learn how.

**STEP ONE:**  
**BECOME**  
**AWARE!**

**STEP ONE** on your path toward responses is to **BECOME AWARE** that you would like to change something about yourself, or a situation, **BEFORE AN EVENT EVEN HAPPENS**. You need to have an awareness that you want to change before change can take place. (*Okay, duh, did you actually have to write that? Yes, we did.*)

For example, you may have ridden your bike to school everyday for the past two months. Today, Jeremy, your neighbor, decides to ride with you on the brand

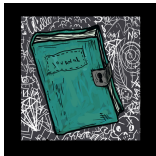
new bike he got for his birthday, and guess what? He blows you away on the bike ride. You peddle 16 times faster and harder just to eat his dust.

Suddenly, you have an awareness that **change** needs to happen. Everyday for the past two months, your bike that you got at age ten was fine. But today you now know that it is too small! While thinking about the morning events, you decide you want to swap it out for a bigger one, like Jeremy's. It's still the same bike you had yesterday, but today you have the awareness that it could be a better bike. **Change** has begun with the simple recognition (awareness) that your bike is not as you wish it to be.

**BRING AWARENESS TO OTHERS!**

If people hurt you, speak up. You can help them, in a nice way, to become more aware of how their actions hurt other people.

**Change** will start when you become aware that you have habits or impulses that are not as you wish them to be.



**PIT STOP:** Go back and look at the two characteristics/habits you wanted to change. Are they reactions or responses? **reactions/ responses** Now choose one that you are going to work on during this chapter. List it here:

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One day, after a really rough game where Harrison fumbled the ball and played pretty poorly, he started to get pretty aggressive in the locker room. Someone asked him to “knock it off,” but Harrison ignored it. Then, when two players approached him and asked him again to quit, Harrison barked, “Get away!” and stiff-armed them into a set of lockers.

All heads turned. One of the guys, Trey, doesn't get to play that much and is pretty mad about it. He went after Harrison. Some other boys stopped Trey just before the coach walked into the locker room, but Harrison was fuming. He was ready to fight. But, then again, these were his friends! He was experiencing very mixed and uncomfortable feelings.

On his way home Harrison thought about his reaction. *That was crazy, he thought to himself. I totally don't want to act like such a jerk. My actions were out of control! Why would I lose it like that? What was going on that made me freak out all of a sudden? Why do I always behave like such an idiot in the locker room after a game? Wait, it was always after a game. Not after a practice. Ah-ha. Maybe I am on to something.* **Even more awareness had entered the situation.**

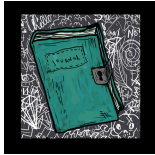
**STEP TWO:  
CREATE A  
STRATEGY!**

**STEP TWO** on your path toward responses is to CREATE A STRATEGY about what you can do differently. For instance, although you can say, “I don’t want to hit my little brother,” what are you going to do the next time he keeps repeating everything you say at the top of his lungs next to your ear? You need a strategy! You need to have a plan.

To change your habit, make a list of other things you can do instead of your (old) habit (yeah, you can put it in the past tense where it belongs. You noticed, eh? Awesome.). Be creative. Instead of hitting your brother, you could:

- Ask him to stop
- Start to tickle him (an excellent diversionary tactic)
- Ignore him
- Start singing at the top of your lungs
- Play your iPod
- Tell your mother
- Start speaking in gobbledee-gook
- Scream, “GREAT BALLS OF FIRE” over and over in his ear

Now, obviously, some of these will be better choices than others, but, which are better for you, is up to you. The point is you now have a good list of what to do the next time he bothers you.



**PIT STOP:** You guessed it. Can you think of a new strategy for a response to the habit you described? Think of several new strategies that you could use to help you break your old habit. Not just one, several, because you never know in the heat of the moment and emotions, which one is going to help you deal the most.

**New strategies:**

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**Harrison’s initial strategy was to find some help. He had some awareness of the situation, but he needed an outsider to help him see it - you know, from an objective point of view.**

**When Harrison got home that day he called his friend Mike. Mike was a pretty logical guy and also one of the few people Harrison could talk to who wouldn’t tease Harrison for being a “loser” —honestly, why was talking about life considered so not cool?**