The Negative Side of Quick Reactions Meeting Kit



THE DANGERS OF AN INCREASED REACTION TIME

Reaction times are important in a multitude of professions and activities. Increased reaction times can affect the performance of athletes, as well as the safety and productivity of shift workers, medical professionals, students, pilots, and anyone else whose work requires sustained attention and quick reflexes.

REACTION TIME EXPLAINED

One would think that reaction time would take a lot longer than it actual does due to all the moving parts our bodies have responding to one another. In the example scenario a hammer is sitting on a shelf. A mechanic bumps the shelf and the hammer slides over the edge and begins to fall. The mechanic sees this occurring and in less than half a second, he sticks his hand out in an attempt to catch the hammer.

In the small amount of time from the hammer beginning to fall to the mechanic reaching out his hand a lot of processes are occurring in his body to create this reaction. According to ScientificAmerican.com, first the information travels from sensory cells called neurons from the eye to the brain’s visual cortex, an area devoted to understanding what you see. Next, the motor cortex—the part of the brain that directs movement—has to send signals along your spinal cord and to your arm, hand and finger muscles, telling them to respond in the proper sequence to catch the hammer—quick!

WORKERS RESPOND (NOT REACT) TO STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Positive workplace relationships give our work meaning. Through these connections, we make impact on those around us and on our organizations. But in order to foster these kinds of relationships, we must cultivate our own self-awareness and self-management skills.

But even the most socially and emotionally intelligent among us find it difficult to remain intentional when feeling stressed. When a situation or a coworker’s behavior agitates us in some way, our emotions can get the best of us. This is a natural part of being human, but it can easily cause disruptions in the workplace.

WHEN EMOTIONS ARE HIGH, THE KEY TO AVOIDING CONFLICT IS TO RESPOND, NOT REACT.

Reacting is letting your emotions rule you. It’s unleashing all the strong feelings you’re experiencing in the moment. People may perceive you as out of control, defensive, or aggressive. They might feel defensive in return and move against you or away from you. As a result, they’ll trust you less.

On the other hand, responding is being aware of how you are feeling in the moment and choosing to respond in a calm, level-headed manner. This doesn’t mean ignoring your feelings or bottling up your frustration. Instead, it involves discussing your needs and concerns in a way that isn’t controlled by your emotions and seeking to understand others’ needs and expectations as well. With a shared understanding of each other, you can then come to agreements on how to best work together. When you practice responding instead of reacting, people are more likely to trust you, and your level of influence goes up.

IMPROVE REACTION TIME – TIPS

Many people want to improve their reaction times to be a safer driver, more productive at work. New parents, shift workers, and emergency responders, need to maintain quick reaction times.

- **Improve hand-eye coordination:** Training in hand-eye coordination can improve reaction times and the improvements may stick around long after the training ends. Try picking a sport or activity that involves hand-eye coordination and practicing on a regular basis for the best results.
- **Be aware of alcohol and caffeine:** Alcohol and caffeine have opposite effects on reaction times. Alcohol slows reaction times11, even at low levels before a person feels or acts intoxicated. Caffeine, on the other hand, can improve reaction times12. While caffeine may help increase reaction time temporarily, don’t forget that it can also interfere with sleep if used too close to bedtime.
- **Try meditation or deep breathing:** Research suggests that meditation can improve reaction times, even in people who are sleep deprived. Slow, deep breathing has shown similar benefits. Try practicing deep breathing or meditation before activities that require quick reaction times.

IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP

Improving your sleep hygiene is a great first step to feeling more rested and improving your reaction time. Here are a few tips for improving your sleep hygiene.

- Get outside and be active
- Be consistent
- Improve your sleep environment
- Understand the role of diet
- Talk to your doctor

One hypothesis asserts that sleep loss increases reaction time due to the body’s simultaneous and competing needs. When we are under slept, our body is experiencing a need for sleep, a need to stay awake, and a need to perform tasks. These competing drives interfere with our attention from moment to moment, leading to cognitive impairment and an increased reaction time.

FINAL WORD

There are times when a quick reaction is the only thing that saves a person’s life. On the other hand, there are also times when quick reactions put people who are completely safe during a bad situation in harm’s way. Be aware of the impulse to act without proper thought.