

How to Use Emotional Anchors during Times of Stress



Workplace stress reached an all-time high in 2022, according to a Gallup report. And a 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey from the American Psychological Association found that workers appreciate and seek mental health support in the workplace.

Imagine you're about to give a big presentation, and suddenly, your heart races, palms sweat, and doubt

creeps in. What if you could instantly summon a sense of calm and confidence, just like flipping a switch? Stressful situations like these are common, but our response to them doesn't have to be overwhelming.

This ability to regain control isn't just wishful thinking—it's a skill you can develop through emotional anchoring. Emotional anchoring is a technique that allows individuals to associate a specific physical or mental trigger with a desired emotional state. By recalling a past moment of confidence, calm, or strength and linking it to a gesture, mantra, or posture, we can train ourselves to access that state whenever we need it. This practice is rooted in neuro-associative conditioning, a concept in psychology that explains how the brain creates links between emotions and external stimuli. Over time, with consistent reinforcement, these anchors become second nature, helping us manage stress effectively.

One powerful way to regain control is by creating positive experiences during highly stressful moments—recalling times when we were confident, calm, and in control. These serve as emotional anchors that we can trigger at will. The book *Emotional Intelligence Game Changers: 101 Simple Ways to Win at Work + Life* shares tips on how to increase our confidence.

Here are several techniques for bringing ourselves into that state:

1. **Identify the state we want to experience**

Take a moment to think of a time when you were in charge of the situation, relaxed and confident with the way things were working out. Remember the feeling that came to you. Think back to that time and try to replay the feelings and sensations in your body when that was happening. Focus on feelings such as confidence, calm, and joy you experienced. Ask yourself, what details can you remember that will bring you back to that place?

2. **Find something that will trigger that state, time, and place**

Work on finding a physical action that will cause you to automatically think of the situation that brings you into a positive state. This could be a physical gesture, such as tapping yourself on a part of your body. Practice this gesture while bringing yourself into a positive state. And make sure you keep this gesture specific to this purpose, and try to avoid using it for anything else.

3. **Check out the anchor in less stressful situations**

Instead of waiting to use it in a highly stressful situation, test out the anchor in moments when you aren't feeling stressful. If it works effectively, then it should be able to work when stress is more prevalent. If the anchor isn't working as you'd expect or want it to, revisit the anchor technique by intensifying the emotion around the event, and modify your trigger accordingly.

4. **Keep practicing and strengthening the anchor**

Look for situations throughout the day when you can practice using your anchor. Any situation that increases your stress, even in small levels, is an opportunity to use and solidify the effects of the anchor. You'll find that if you practice this technique over time, it will become easier to access when you most need it. You'll no longer need to think of the anchor because it'll become your natural response in stressful situations. Like any habit, building strong emotional anchors takes time and repetition, but the benefits are well worth it.

5. **Put your body into it**

Another way of strengthening the anchor is to align our physical state with the feelings of confidence. When you straighten your body, put out your chest, and pull back your shoulders, you encourage your body to amplify readiness, strength, and confidence. Add this posture to your anchor.

6. **Add an inner mantra**

Repeating a mantra over time can also add strength to the anchor. Personalize it to make it more uniquely yours. You'll want to use words that are powerful, that deeply resonate with you, and that are true of how you felt during the time when you're experiencing the feelings.

7. **Think of situations where the anchor will be helpful**

The best way to strengthen the anchor is to anticipate situations where you know it can be useful, then practice using it during these times. Any place, time, or circumstance that brings you out of your comfort zones is a great time to practice. As you begin to experience the benefits of using this in various situations, you'll find it more and more natural to practice these anchors, and you'll also embed it in your habits and memories.

Emotional Anchoring in the Workplace

Emotional anchoring can be an invaluable tool in the workplace, helping employees manage stress, stay focused, and approach challenges with a calm and confident mindset. Employees who use emotional anchors are better equipped to handle high-pressure situations such as presentations, performance reviews, and deadlines. By reducing stress and increasing emotional resilience, anchoring can contribute to a more positive and productive work environment.



Managers and supervisors can play a crucial role in fostering emotional anchoring among their employees. Here are a few ways they can support this practice:

- **Encourage Mindfulness and Self-Awareness** – Providing employees with resources on stress management techniques, including emotional anchoring, can help them build awareness of their emotional states and develop their own anchors.
- **Incorporate Anchoring into Training and Coaching** – Leadership training and performance coaching sessions can include exercises on emotional anchoring, helping employees integrate these techniques into their daily routines.
- **Create a Supportive Work Culture** – Encouraging a work environment that prioritizes mental well-being—such as promoting breaks, mindfulness moments, and open communication—can reinforce the practice of emotional anchoring.
- **Model Emotional Anchoring** – Leaders who demonstrate emotional anchoring techniques, such as using grounding exercises before stressful meetings, set an example for employees to follow.

With practice, emotional anchoring can become second nature, helping employees and leaders alike navigate workplace stress with confidence and resilience. Try setting an anchor today—identify a confident moment, create a trigger, and start strengthening your ability to stay calm under pressure. Mastering this technique is not just about reducing stress—it's about stepping into your best, most empowered self.

Solutions EAP provides free, short-term, and confidential counseling for employees and their families.

Call **1-800-526-3485** for information and a confidential appointment.

www.solutions-eap.com