



# MAINTAINING COMPOSURE

Imagine finding out that a major project you have invested weeks of hard work into has been unexpectedly cancelled. How might you feel and react? Now try to visualise a time when a customer has snapped at you unfairly; or when you have been given more work than you thought was possible to handle. What kinds of emotions come to surface for you?

It's likely these types of stressful work events trigger strong emotional reactions such as disappointment, anger or despair. Strong emotions shape the way we react, and when we allow our reactions to be governed by our emotions we often respond to stress in unhelpful ways. This is why it is important to master the skill of maintaining composure.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAINTAIN COMPOSURE?

Composure is the ability to stay calm and in control when under stress. Our capacity to do so is reflected in our attitude, body language and how we communicate with those around us.

Maintaining composure is not about learning to control your emotions. Instead, it's about developing skills which help you respond more effectively to stress.

Just like kicking the tie-breaking goal in a football game or nailing a guitar solo in front of a sold-out venue, maintaining composure under significant pressure is a skill that we can only utilise readily if we have practised regularly under lower stress conditions.

## HOW CAN YOU LEARN TO MAINTAIN COMPOSURE?

Here are four tips for learning to achieve composure. Try practising these skills regularly so that you can respond more effectively during times of increased pressure.

### FOCUS ON TAKING SLOW, DEEP BREATHS



Our breathing can become shallow and rapid, or alternatively we can tend to hold our breath when we begin to feel stressed. Slow, deep breaths help us to manage our stress reaction by keeping our heart rate low.

### IDENTIFY UNHELPFUL PATTERNS OF THOUGHT



Check in on your thinking. Notice when you are catastrophising, using negative language, or labelling yourself or others unfavourably. Ask yourself, "Is this thought helpful, and does it help me reach my goal?"

### CONNECT WITH THE WORLD AROUND YOU



When you are getting caught up in unhelpful thoughts, try a grounding technique to come back to the present moment. For example, close your eyes and focus your attention on each sound you hear; or look around and name each object you see one-by-one.

### TRY LABELLING YOUR EMOTIONS



When you notice the impacts of strong emotion, try labelling what is occurring by saying something like, "I'm feeling X" or "I'm experiencing Y". Acknowledging the emotion you are experiencing can help you to move on from it more readily.