

ARE YOU A PRESSURE COOKER ABOUT TO EXPLODE?

THE BARRIER TO EMPATHY AND EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

BY ASH GARD

Ever wondered why seemingly nice, normal people just completely lose their stuff over the smallest things? Suddenly becoming aggressive, abusive or straight up violent. If I hadn't witnessed this phenomenon constantly during my 20 year career in the security, military and law enforcement industries I wouldn't feel compelled to write this article.

I've come to the conclusion that people fall into three distinct categories:

- Good people
- Bad people; and
- Good people doing stupid things.

I think at times, all of us (apart from the inherently bad people) can fall into the third category at some time in life (some more frequently than others) The question is why?

Welcome to the PRESSURE COOKER

Ultimately life is a roller-coaster. We are thrown some real curve balls that we just never see coming and often at times when life is already a bit of a battle.

I believe that everyone has a pressure cooker. It is an analogy of course but it represents the internal storage of stress related issues that compound within people like you and me on a day to day basis.

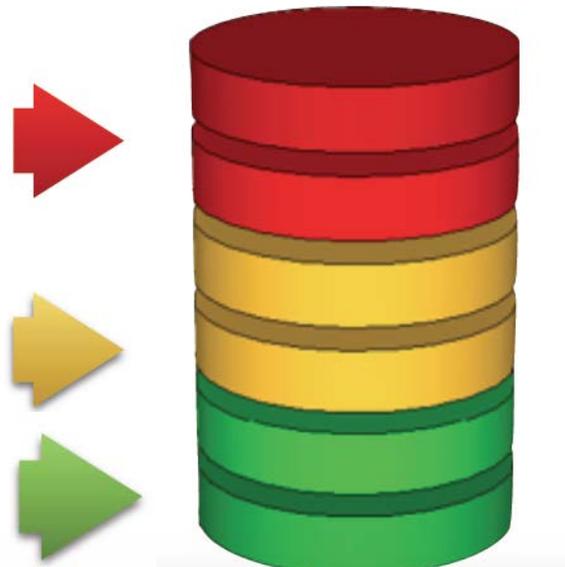
Within that cooker, somewhere lays a hidden level, a tolerance level that when reached acts as a trigger. The human body is a well-equipped weapon, similar to a fully loaded firearm sitting in wait for a person to pick it up and simply pull the trigger. A cunning mind, hands, elbows, knees, feet and heads make the human body an incredibly efficient fighting machine, luckily few people are ever taught how to employ it to its full potential. My thinking is that when the pressure in the cooker approaches this tolerance level, the smallest of things can break that line triggering a catastrophic event.

TRIGGER LINE

The line between the orange zone and the red zone is the tolerance level that if crossed will spark a potentially catastrophic event.

The orange zone is the level that a person will start to demonstrate to people close to them small behaviours that indicate they may have some emotional psychological issues that are starting to compound.

The green zone within the pressure cooker is the level of stress that a person can tolerate without demonstrating any overt indications that they are struggling with lifes issues.



Ever heard the expression that "he/she has a short fuse"? Think about it - maybe their "green zone" of tolerance is simply much smaller than other peoples or they are in the "Orange zone" demonstrating subconsciously to those around them that their pressure cooker is about to explode. Either way, left unattended it is certain that a meltdown of some sort will occur in the near future that may have a dramatic effect on those around them.



Average
Tolerance
but shows
indicators
early



High
Tolerance
but shows
indicators
late



Average
Tolerance but
shows no
indicators



High
Tolerance but
shows no
indicators



Low
Tolerance
but shows
indicators



Low
Tolerance but
shows no
indicators
"Short Fuse"

**Which type are you?
Draw your colours**



Ultimately we are talking about empathy - your ability to understand why someone is acting in a particular way. By taking a moment and stepping into their shoes, seeing it from their perspective, you are arming yourself with knowledge to approach the situation from an angle that is conducive to resolving conflict effectively.

In any conflict there are at least two personalities, two people seeing the world through their own unique set of eyes with a unique database of knowledge built over a life time based on their own personal experiences.

What makes us so human is that none of us have the same database of knowledge or facts. It is impossible, without empathy, to share the same opinion simply because we haven't collected the same data in order to draw similar conclusions.

Therefore conflict resolution is an exercise in collecting data, understanding facts from fiction and using that data to achieve a symbiotic result that allows all parties to walk away feeling listened to, respected and with their dignity intact.

Your attitude has a massive effect on the way the conflict plays out. Are you listening to the other person? or just repeating the same information over and over again, based on your own knowledge database and assumptions, while thinking this person just doesn't get it. Are you refusing to collect data from the other person so that you can make an appropriate and educated decision? Are you being arrogant.....

Is your pressure cooker so full of rubbish that you can't or won't treat people with dignity and respect? Yep thats right.... I am asking you if your PRESSURE COOKER is at capacity and needs to be released. Most people see the faults in others but fail to see how their attitude makes it impossible to find resolution.

At the age of 20 i had a really tough break up, my first really, and it knocked me for six big time. I was moping around feeling sorry for myself oblivious to everyone around me. One morning I went into work (a pizzeria) and as I entered the shop I walked past "Basty", a German exchange student that worked as a delivery driver. Trying to be nice I said "Morning Basty how are ya mate" and kept walking out the back to the kitchen.

Suddenly I heard the door slam behind me and as I turned here is Basty, red in the face, staring at me yelling STOP, JUST F#\$%ING STOP.... It really startled me. I honestly thought he was going to hit me.... I thought he was crazy.

As it turned out he explained that everyday I walk past him saying "Hi" and asking how he was going, but not once did I ever



stop and actually listen for his response. "In Germany if we ask someone a question we respect them and wait for a reply" he said... "not keep walking. If you don't care just say hello... don't ask me how I'm feeling".

WOW I had no idea that I was disrespecting him everyday for 6 months. His perspective and mine were totally, universally different. In his rage he took the opportunity to continue to vent his opinion and commented on my recent break up. "Get over yourself" he said. "You are walking around with your tail between your legs like a dog. You are bringing everyone down and its not that we don't care its just 3 months later you need to move on".

My god really, he just said that, is what i was thinking but the next thing that came out of his mouth changed me forever.

"You are not the only person with issues, EVERYONE SUFFERS PAIN BUT MISERY IS AN OPTION..... That was a light bulb moment for me. Firstly you gotta love Germans for their frankness lol, but his words resonated with me and have helped me constantly throughout my life.

How you ask.... well when things don't go to plan I take a moment to be mindful.

I ask myself how I feel and and what options I have to help me move on. Its made me take full responsibility for me, and realise that I need to be my own best friend and choose to not let life get me down and impact those around me, especially my kids.

So I ask again, what level is your pressure cooker? Do a quick self assessment and draw a line on the pressure gauge that indicates your current level of frustration.



Releasing the pressure

One of the most likely places to find conflict is in your own home, with your own spouse or family members. Frustration and resentment build up to a point where extraordinarily, lovers stop talking to each other, communication breaks down and resentment forces a wedge between people who were once the very best of friends. Essentially we need a mechanism that allows us to relieve the pressure stored within us.



In our classes I am amazed how often students are instructed by their spouse to go back to Krav Maga and train. Often students that take extended time off training for reasons that life throws at them, walk back in 2-4 years later saying that they have become aggressive and angry due to the pressures of life.

Smart spouses understand the need for partners to do something for them, something that takes them away from the daily grind and acts as a release. For me it has been a playing guitar (badly) and Krav Maga. Guitar has been the Ying to Krav Maga's Yang meaning it brings some balance to the hard style of training that I have dedicated my time to. If I listen to my body it's telling me that I need to focus on mobility and diet, so these are the new challenges that I personally face and will adapt my recreational time, my "me time" to address.

Of course there is a time commitment to ensuring the mental wellbeing of the ones we love, the question is what do you consider reasonable. What is a happy, supportive, relaxed spouse worth to you. 1,2,3 maybe four hours of "their time" per week to create a happy stress free home.

Here is a short list of just some of the things my friends do to release the pressure :)

- Running
- Gym
- Knitting
- Reading
- Music
- Martial arts
- Watching movies
- Yoga
- Ironing (yep a bloke too :)
- Drawing
- Colouring in
- Playing an instrument
- Going to the pub with some mate
- Mountain biking
- Bush walking
- Crocheting
- Coffee with friends
- Surfing
- Kite surfing
- Cycling
- Archery
- Shooting
- Team sports
- Driving
- Golf
- Swimming
- Writing
- Rock climbing

Are you jaded? Do you find your partner frustrating? Are you constantly in conflict with people?

If you drive a car and get tooted at on a regular basis, do you think, "god there are so many ggressive drivers on the road", or do you see it from the other persons perspective and realise you are driving slowly in the overtaking lane?

Maybe, just maybe, you are contributing to the problem and the question is do you need to release the pressure cooker?