

Trigger Happy

Release tension. Set intention. The case for living by triggers.

Stress is not the enemy — unmanaged stress is.

The human stress response was genuinely useful for most of human history. The problem is the volume of stimulus modern life delivers. This piece is about identifying the recurring triggers in your life and converting them from reactive moments into intentional ones.

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We are not built for this.

As a species we are relatively simple — survive and procreate. The stress response that evolved to serve those imperatives was genuinely useful. Danger triggers alertness. Alertness triggers action. Action resolves the threat. Reset.

That is not how stress works now. Now it comes from scrolling Instagram, from a curious Google search, from a peer who just saw something upsetting on their feed. The volume of stimulus is overwhelming a system designed for occasional, acute threats. And then you opened a business — which means the stress never stays at the office, because there is no office.

The Trigger Concept

You cannot stop the stimulus. Moving off-grid is not happening regardless of how many off-grid reality shows you watch. So the question is what to do within the parameters that exist.

Throughout each day, you encounter the same situations in recognizable patterns. The stimulus changes, but the categories repeat. These are predictable. And because they are predictable, they can be prepared for.

A trigger is a recurring situation you have identified in advance and assigned an intention to. Instead of reacting to the situation, you respond to your own preparation.

Examples From the Road

For over a decade, traveling the world for seminars meant airports, delays, hotels, and every friction that accompanies that life. I could live perpetually frustrated — like most people in airports choose to — or I could be intentional.

The TSA trigger: When I arrive at security, I ask myself how I can bring genuine energy to the first officer I meet. I greet them with gratitude.

The boarding trigger: I close my eyes for two minutes and visualize the destination — what it looks like, smells like, feels like. Release the tension, see the intention.

The new light trigger: No matter where I land, I commit to finding something worth photographing. It has made me deeply appreciative of how differently light presents itself in different places.

Before each coaching call: What energy does this client need today? Calls can take a lot out of you. This resets intention for each one.

Building Your Own List

Look at your life objectively. Where do you consistently find yourself overwhelmed or reactive? What situations repeat?

Name them. Write them down. For each one, decide in advance what you want to feel, do, or bring.

Before a difficult conversation: What is my goal and how do I want to show up? Before checking your phone first thing in the morning: What is the one thing that matters most today?

Does it work every time? No. Some days the situation wins. Even then, have one more trigger ready: when you feel you have lost the moment entirely, find one thing — just one — you can still control or appreciate. Anchor there.

The compounding return

Happiness is not possessed. It is created — in every interaction, decision, and situation. A simple act of deliberate presence, repeated daily across recurring situations, yields returns disproportionate to the effort.

Choose actions for tomorrow. Leave yesterday in the past.