



Mind The Mindset

Someone says one thing about your work, maybe in a meeting, maybe in a two-line message, and it lands like a punch.

By lunch you've replayed it twenty times, you've written three replies in your head, and somehow a comment about one page has become proof that you're bad at your whole job.

Then it follows you home and into bed.

That reaction is real pain, and it's built into you.

Criticism switches on the same part of the brain that makes physical pain feel upsetting, which is why "don't take it personally" never works.

On top of that, your body floods with stress for close to an hour, and while it does, the part of your brain that plans and stays calm is partly offline.

So the replies you draft in those first minutes are written by the least capable version of you.

Most people try to wait it out or sleep on it, but replay is just as strong weeks later as on the same day.

What shortens it is what you do in the first ten minutes, in a set order, on one sheet of paper.

THE 5 STEPS

1

BUY TIME WITH ONE SENTENCE, AND WRITE DOWN THEIR EXACT WORDS

Your first job is to stop yourself deciding anything yet.

In the moment, say one calm sentence, such as "Did I understand that right?" or "Let me think about it and come back to you."

Then write down the actual words they used, as close as you can get

them, before your memory starts rewriting them.

Don't defend, explain or agree yet.

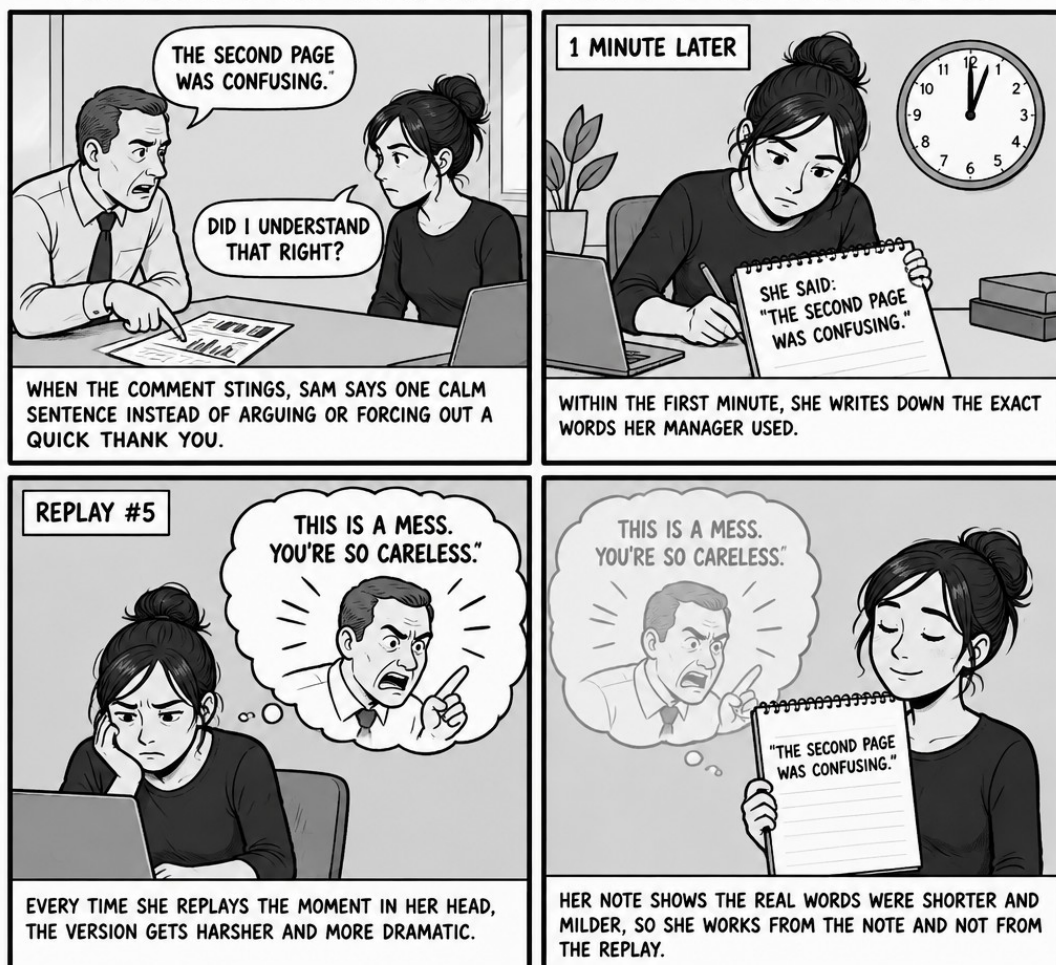
Arguing and the quick gritted-teeth "thank you" both lock you into a position before you even know what the comment means.

Your memory of a hard moment gets worse every time you replay it, because each pass adds more hurt and more drama.

Writing their words down in the first minute gives you a fixed record to work from instead of the version your stress is building.

You'll know it's working when you read their real words on the page and they sound shorter and milder than the version playing in your head.

WHEN A COMMENT STINGS, BUY TIME WITH ONE CALM SENTENCE AND WRITE DOWN THEIR EXACT WORDS IN THE FIRST MINUTE



2

NAME THE FEELING IN TWO WORDS, ONCE

Saying how bad it feels calms you faster than pretending it's fine.

Take your sheet and write one or two plain words for what you feel, like "Embarrassed. Caught out." or "Angry. Stung." Then stop.

This sounds too simple, but in a careful test with people facing something they feared, naming the feeling calmed their bodies more than trying to see things differently or distracting themselves did.

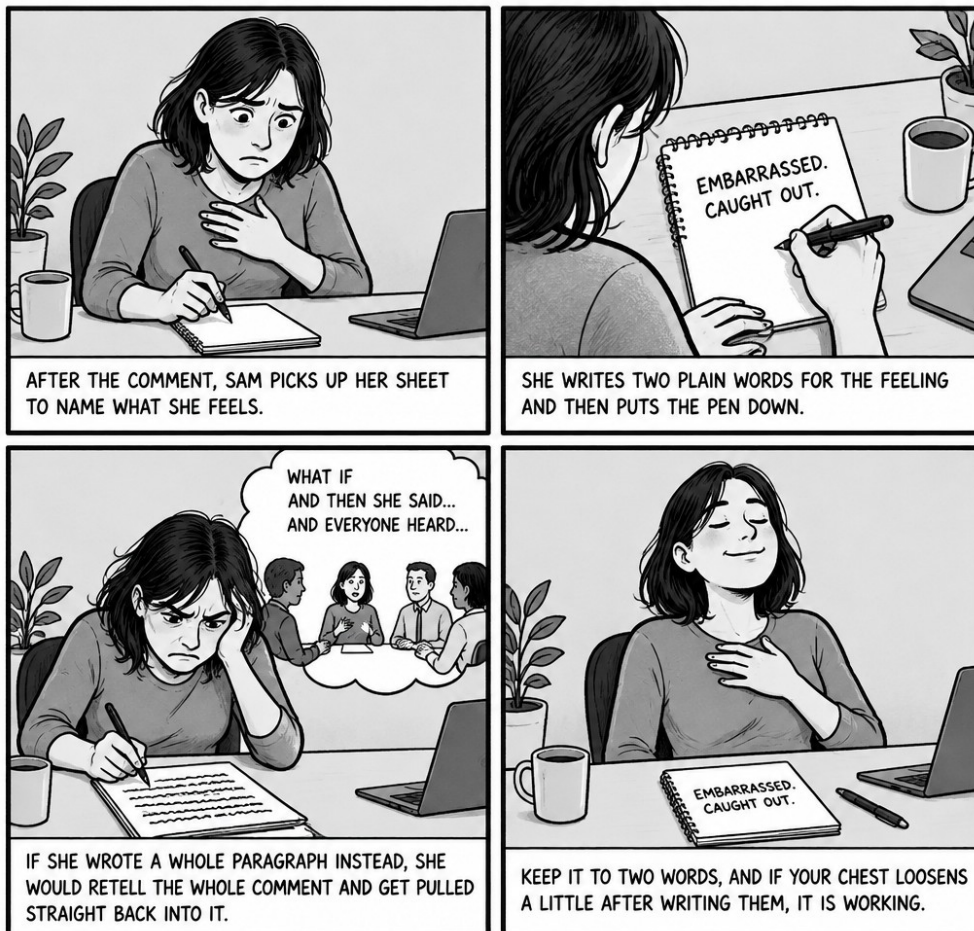
Putting a feeling into words turns down the brain's alarm.

So keep it to two words.

If you write a whole paragraph, you end up telling the story of the comment all over again, and it pulls you straight back in.

If your chest loosens a little after writing the words, it's working.

NAME YOUR FEELING IN TWO PLAIN WORDS AND THEN STOP WRITING



3

TALK TO YOURSELF BY NAME, THEN TAKE ONE LONG BREATH

Using your own name puts a little distance between you and the replay.

Say to yourself, quietly, “There’s the replay,” or “Why is Sam still on this?” using your own name instead of “I”.

Then breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth for about 90 seconds, making each out-breath a bit longer than the in-breath, with one hand on your chest or stomach.

In a brain-scan study, people who thought about a painful memory using their own name felt clearly less upset than when they said “I”, and it took no extra effort or willpower.

The long out-breath tells your body the threat is over, because part of you still thinks the conversation is happening.

You’ll know it’s working when you notice the replay starting and step out of it, instead of finding yourself ten minutes deep.

4

DO ONE PASS ON PAPER AND PICK ONE NEXT ACTION

Their diagnosis is useful, but their fix is only an opinion.

Spend about four minutes on this. Draw a line down the page.

On the left, write only what a camera could have caught, such as “She said the second page was confusing.”

On the right, write what you’re guessing about what they think, like “She thinks I’m careless.”

Most of the pain lives on the right, and none of it is fact.

Next, write two short lists: what’s wrong with this feedback, and what might be right about it.

Most of it can be off, while a small part is exactly what helps you grow

Keep what they noticed separate from the fix they suggested, because you can use the first and still solve it your own way.

Then write one next action that's specific and in your control, like "Rewrite the opening of page two by Thursday."

"Find out what she really thinks of me" doesn't count.

One written plan quiets the replay because your brain stops nagging about something it knows is handled.

And remember that taking feedback well does not mean you have to take the feedback.

ABOUT 4 MINUTES



1

WHAT A CAMERA CAUGHT

"She said the second page was confusing."

WHAT I'M GUESSING

"She thinks I'm careless."

MOST OF THE PAIN IS HERE.
NONE OF IT IS FACT.

2

WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT

-
-
-

WHAT MIGHT BE RIGHT

-
-
-

90%

10%

MOST OF IT IS OFF

A SMALL PART HELPS

3

☒ ONE NEXT ACTION

5

WRITE THE ONE SENTENCE YOU'LL SAY BACK, THEN CLOSE IT

The loop keeps running because it's waiting for an ending, so give it one.

Write the single sentence you'll say to them later.

It might be “I’m taking the point about the summary, but I’d like to show you why I kept the chart,” or a question that turns a vague comment into something usable: “What’s one thing you’d have had me do differently on page two?”

Then say a closing line out loud if you can, something as simple as “That conversation is over and I’m okay.”

It doesn’t need to be perfect. It just needs to be an ending.

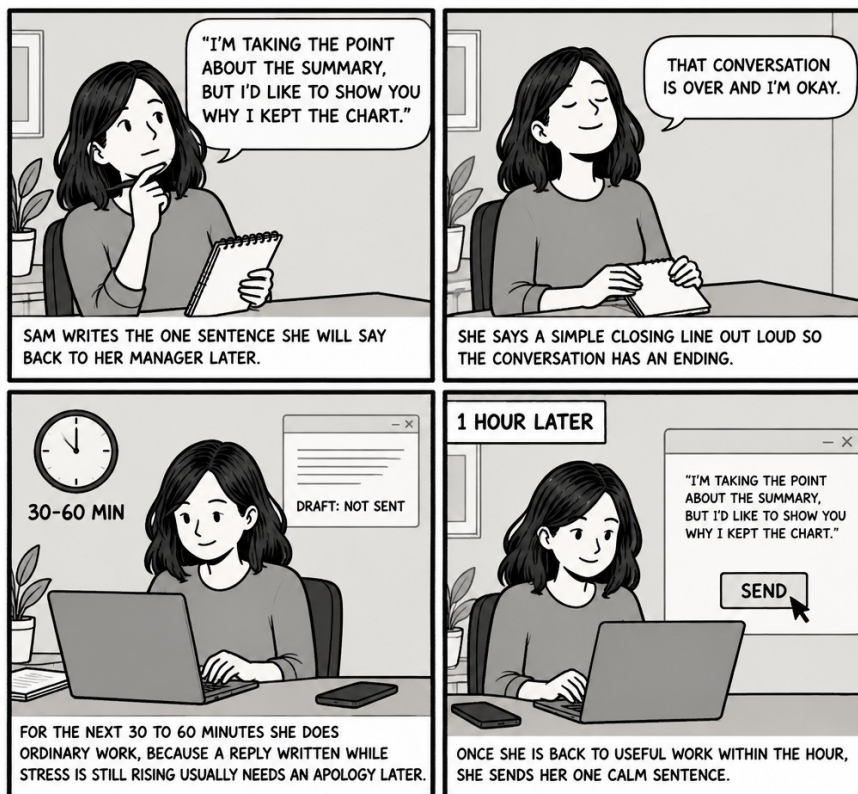
Now go do 30 to 60 minutes of ordinary work before you send anything.

Your stress is still rising for the first half hour, so a reply written then usually needs an apology later.

Skip polling coworkers and rereading the message, because both keep the alarm running.

If you can get back to useful work within the hour, it’s working.

WRITE THE ONE SENTENCE YOU WILL SAY BACK, CLOSE THE CONVERSATION, AND WAIT AT LEAST HALF AN HOUR BEFORE SENDING ANYTHING



WHAT TO EXPECT, AND WHEN

The first time, the replay will probably come back ten minutes later, and that's normal.

Run the breath and the "There's the replay" line again, because each time you do it, you catch the replay a little earlier.

Over the first week or two, you'll notice each replay gets shorter and costs you fewer nights.

When three days of replay becomes an afternoon, then fifteen minutes, you're winning.

One bad night after a few good weeks doesn't mean it failed.

Check whether you slept badly or were unwell, because both make neutral comments sound hostile. Then do the next ten minutes the same way.

If the replay is turning into avoiding work, panic, or trouble eating or sleeping, see a professional, because that needs more than a ten-minute reset.