



The

**HEADFIRST**

*Personal Safety*

# DE-ESCALATION

5 STEPS



PERSONAL SAFETY



MAKE TIME



CONTROLLED BREATHING



CONTROLLED RESPONSE



EMOTIONS OVER ISSUE

# 1. PERSONAL SAFETY

If you know the environment when confrontation is likely, have a plan where to retreat to. Whether you're in a restaurant, a store, a hotel, a bar, a warehouse, an outside event or even someone's house; the two most important things to identify are:



## COVER

Can you put anything between you to create a barrier if someone starts to become aggressive? A table, a counter, a sofa, a support pillar- a vehicle if it's outside. It doesn't have to be fixed, moving subtly behind a shopping trolley, or using a chair as a shield might not work for long but can create an obstruction to a sudden attack.

Remember we're just trying to create time and distance and reduce the opportunity for an attacker to get hold of you.



## ENTRANCE & EXITS

No matter how well you know a place, always know where the nearest way to safety is. Just as importantly, if there's a door between you and safety, know which way it opens and how to unlock it or lock it quickly behind you. Make sure your staff know.

Hostages in the Lindt café siege escaped because they worked out how to operate the emergency release button on the door. If it doesn't lock, is there a way of barricading it from the inside? Where does it lead? Can you get help/phone the Police from there?.

Next time you're at work and before you open to the public, look for and practice moving to safety from different points in the venue. Have a plan and don't assume all your staff already know how everything works.

## 2. MAKE TIME FOR IT

*If you have to calm an angry or aggressive person down you have to work at the speed of the person you're dealing with, not your own speed.*

You might have other customers waiting but if you come across as impatient or inattentive to their needs because you're multi tasking, I guarantee you're going to make it worse. They need to become the centre of your world, not just for safety but also to ensure you don't miss the opportunity to solve their problem.

That's not to say you neglect your other customers.

### EFFECTIVE DE-ESCALATION

Takes time



### YOU DON'T WANT

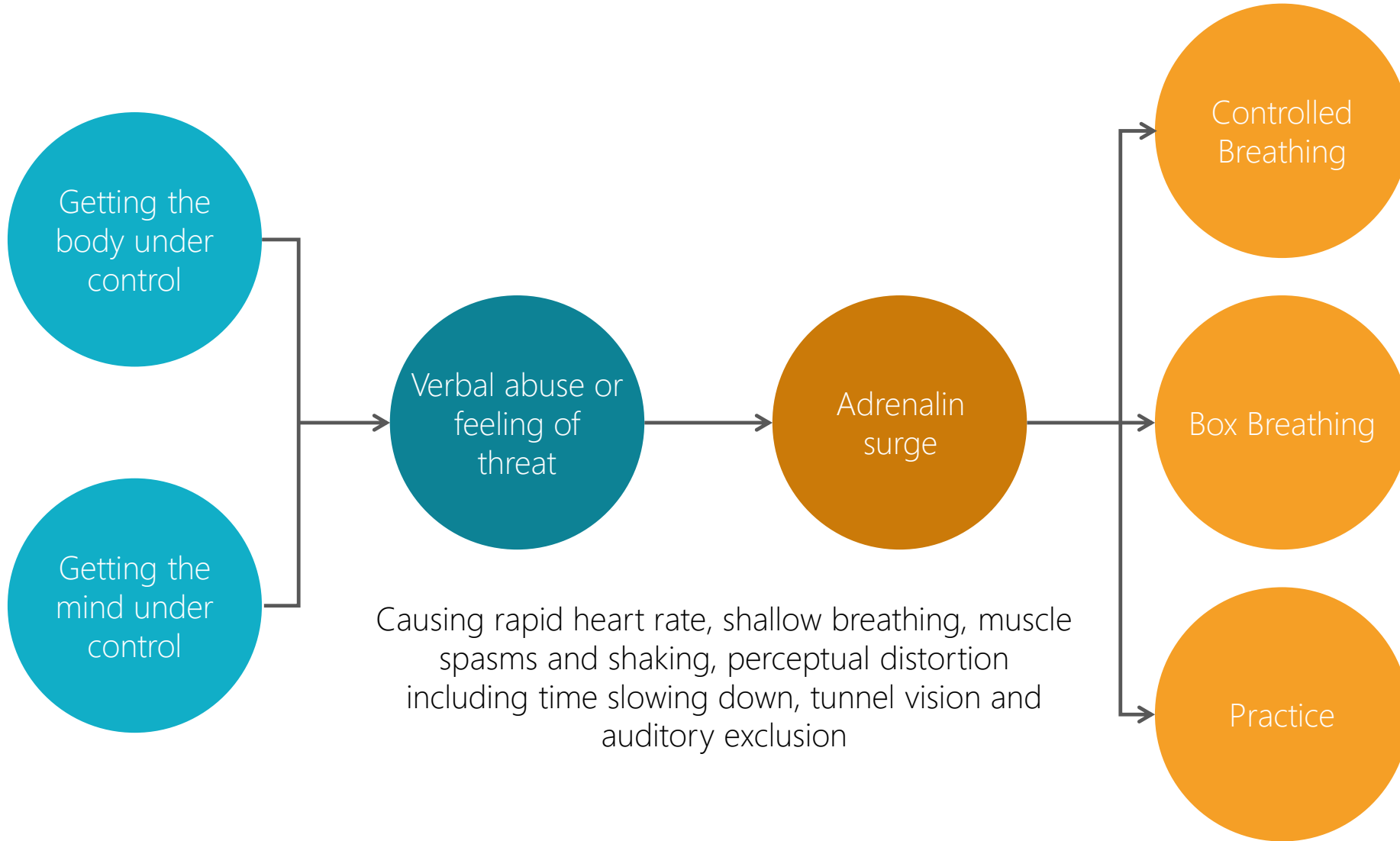
one angry person turning into several, nor do you want to give your angry person an audience.

### YOU DO WANT

to have a plan in place if you have to deal with an aggressive person, someone else can take over your job, move others on, continue service etc..

# 3. CONTROL YOUR BREATHING

Breathing is often neglected but there are 2 vital reasons you need to practice this:



Causing rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, muscle spasms and shaking, perceptual distortion including time slowing down, tunnel vision and auditory exclusion

Helps slow your heart rate, stop you shaking, think clearly & reduce perceptual distortion

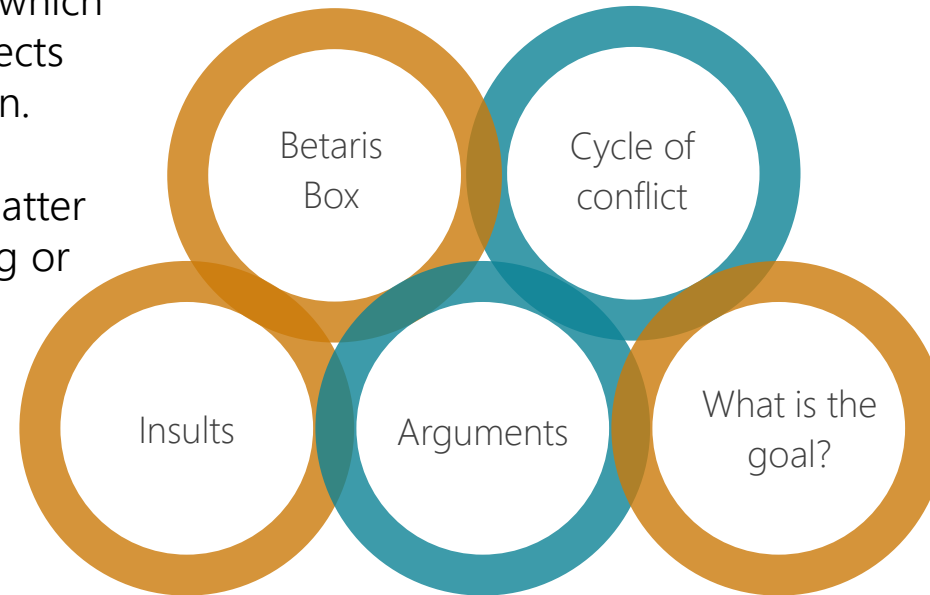
1. Breathe in via your nose for 4.
  2. Hold your breath for 4
  3. Exhale via your mouth for 4
  4. Hold your breath for 4
- Repeat.**

Practice when it's calm and then move onto more pressured situations

## 4. CONTROLLED RESPONSE



When 2 people are interacting, person 1's attitude, affects person 2's attitude, which affects person 1's attitude, which affects person 2's attitude, and so it goes on. The cycle is self-perpetuating which means that before long it doesn't matter who starts it as there is no beginning or end.



Understand that insults feel personal but they're not. Someone may threaten to do unspeakable things to you or your loved ones but their anger is aimed at your position rather than who you are. Insults are designed to illicit a response, nothing more.



Remember your goal is to de-escalate the situation not win an argument. They might be 100% in the wrong and you have all the facts to prove it but that's unlikely to calm someone down. Firstly, because no one likes to be made to feel stupid or be condescended to, and secondly because the reason they're saying they're angry is not actually the reason why they're angry

## 5. DEAL WITH THE EMOTION FIRST



During a normal interaction, two calm people work together to solve a problem. That's because both people are using the pre-frontal cortex part of their brain to find a solution, which is exactly what that part is designed for. This is when normal customer service policy works between customer and the business.



But when somebody gets angry, better yet, is in a rage, they're suffering what's called an Amygdala hijack. Decision making is taken away from the pre-frontal cortex and put under the control of the Amygdala - a part of the brain that controls temper and which is incapable of rational thought. On other words you're no longer talking to the 'person' that cares about finding a solution



So how do we calm them down? Firstly don't say 'calm down'. It has never worked. Instead you first need to acknowledge their anger.

### YOU ACKNOWLEDGE

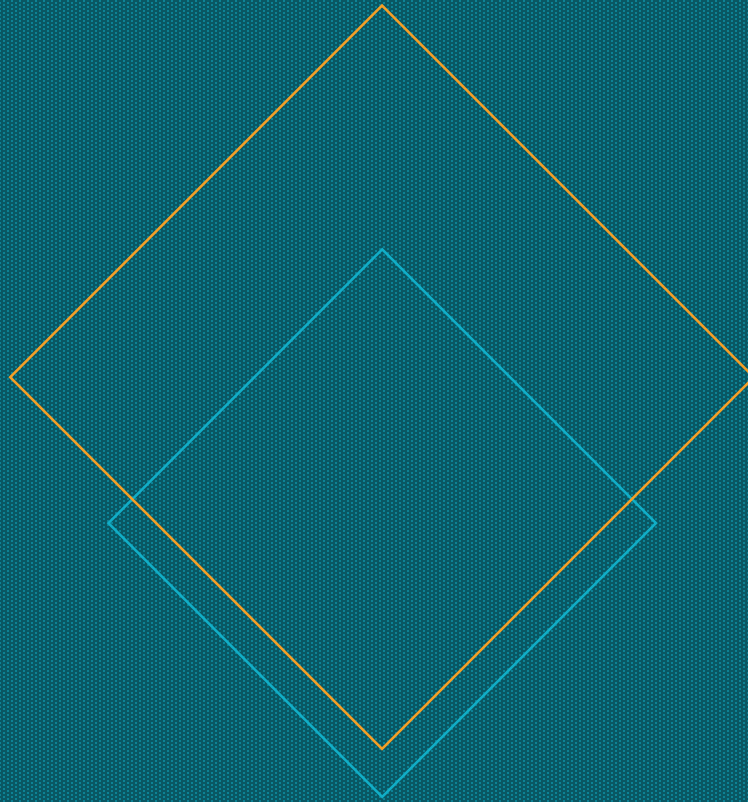
Start with *"I can see you're angry and frustrated. You feel let down by this situation and that no one understands or seems to care."*  
Validate how they feel.

### ONCE THEY ACKNOWLEDGE

Then you can say *"look lets figure this out, what's your name.."* or *"Let's take a seat.."*  
This will further show your investment in taking the time to help them.

### DON'T SKIP ANY STEPS

If they start getting angry again, go right back to defining their emotion. Whatever the issue, validate their feeling first before trying to solve their problem. Don't be tempted to go for the quick fix.



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