

Trauma and Business Reflection Questions



Welcome to the Trauma and Business Reflection Questions Workbook, a Mental Health Resource for entrepreneurs, written by **The Entrepreneurs' Therapist Shulamit Ber Levtov**, MA, RSW, CCTP.

Innovators & Entrepreneurs Foundation has partnered with GreenShieldCares to provide Mental Health resources to Canadian entrepreneurs.

Self-responsibility

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the questions, please let them go.

You may choose to come back to them another time, either alone or in discussion with a supportive business friend.

You may choose never to address them again.

Whatever you choose is OK.

If you find you are feeling overwhelmed and can't get a handle on your emotions, please contact a mental health professional for direct, personal support. To connect with a mental health professional one-on-one in Canada, call 1-866-585-0445 or text WELLNESS to 741741.



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Trauma and Business Reflection Questions

Small-T traumas

So-called “small ‘t’ traumas” are events that exceed our capacity to cope and cause a disruption in emotional functioning. They are usually small incidents that occurred on an ongoing basis.

These events are distressing and overwhelming, but, unlike the DSM definition or popular conceptions of trauma, they are not an in-the-moment threat to life or bodily integrity.

However, they can nevertheless be understood as traumatic, because 1) they’ve had a significant impact on our sense of ourselves as worthy and on our beliefs about ourselves, other people, and the world, and also because 2) they can engender feelings of helplessness or powerlessness.

Here are some examples:

- Bullying
- Differences from the dominant culture and its standards, including but not limited to neurodivergence, gender and sexuality, “race,” learning differences, etc.
- Infidelity of a partner
- Divorce
- Abrupt or extended relocation
- Interactions with the law or criminal systems
- Scarcity: including scarcity of food, money, shelter, poverty, love, etc.
- Relational trauma: Your sense of safety or being loved or valued by your significant others is disrupted. Emotional neglect, mis-attunement, or abandonment

Small ‘t’ traumas are called “small-t” because they may seem inconsequential on the surface, especially in comparison to so-called “big-T” traumas.

The issue is how the experience affected you. If you felt alone with, harmed and/or overwhelmed by these experiences, that can be traumatizing to your system.

Reflection prompt:

What small-t traumas have I experienced, if any?



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Big-T trauma

Big-T trauma is what we usually think of when we think of the term trauma. It's defined by the DSM as "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s). Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend."

Examples of traumatic events that fit this definition include but aren't limited to natural disaster, terrorist attack, sexual assault, military combat, a car, or plane accident, etc.

Helplessness is a key factor for both big-T and small-t traumas, but it can be experienced more intensely or immediately in the case of a big-T trauma. Big-T traumas are more often recognized as traumas by those experiencing them and by anyone with whom they choose to share their experience.

Reflection prompt:

What big-T traumas have I experienced, if any?



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Impact of trauma

Traumatic experiences can affect us in many areas, including safety, trust, power and control, self-esteem, intimacy, boundaries, visibility, money.

Reflection prompts:

What are some of the areas of my life that have been affected by trauma, and how?

- safety
- trust
- power and control
- self-esteem
- intimacy
- boundaries
- visibility
- money

What are some of the beliefs I have about myself in these areas of life?



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Trauma responses

The human nervous system and organism has a range of responses to trauma and stress. They show up in our bodies and behaviours in specific ways.

It's important to remember:

- 1) Most often, these responses are outside of our conscious control. They can be changed but that takes focussed and consistent work with the support of a professional.
- 2) These responses were intended to help us survive. The only standard by which we can measure these behaviours is if we survived (not if they made sense, if they caused problems down the line, or if others criticize them, etc.).

FIGHT: The fight response involves a release of hormones (primarily cortisol and adrenaline) in the body that trigger a reaction to stay and ward off or "fight" the apparent threat.

An example of a pro-social fight response: when a client belittles or patronizes you, and you communicate and implement boundaries.

An example of an anti-social fight response: verbally attacking or physically hitting that person.

FLIGHT: The flight response involves a release of stress hormones that signal us to flee from the danger or threat. Instead of staying in a dangerous situation, this response causes us to run--literally or metaphorically.

In the example above, an example of running could be abruptly leaving the client meeting.

FREEZE: The freeze response leaves us temporarily paralyzed by fear and unable to move. In this response, rather than fighting off the danger or running away from it, we do nothing.

In the example above, a freeze response could be drawing a blank and being unable to respond.

FAWN: The fawn response is a kind of going along, or not rocking the boat.

In the example above, it could show up as smiling politely and (if, for example, they were unsatisfied with the already clearly stated scope of work) agreeing to do more work that was agreed upon for the established fee.



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People-pleasing at the expense of your well-being is one type of fawn response. It's a way of avoiding conflict (a kind of emotional survival) by using compliance and helpfulness.

Reflection prompts:

What is my go-to “trauma response”?

How have I observed my go-to “trauma response” show up in my business?



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Parts

The psychological concept of parts suggests that we are all made up of "parts" that can think, feel and act differently from each other—sometimes even at the same time.

If you've ever found yourself saying something like "a part of me knows I need to get up for work, but a part of me wants to stay in bed and sleep" then you have already experienced some sense of connection with and understanding of your parts.

When we've been through trauma, sometimes we can feel stuck, or find ourselves acting in ways we don't want or don't intend to. In these cases, we could say that our parts are making the choices for us.

Parts come forward for a good reason. They almost always have valid concerns and wisdom to share, but connecting with that requires time and care.

Reflection prompts:

What are some of the parts I have become aware of today.

What thoughts, fears, criticisms, judgments do they have?

What might be on the flip side of these thoughts, fears, or judgments?



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Other ways trauma can show up in business

What does my relationship with myself as a boss look like?

What might I want to change about that?

What support do I need to be able to do that?

In what ways have I been equating productivity with my value as a person?

Where might those ideas have come from?

Who has said these things to me or where have I heard them?

How is hustle and hustle culture showing up in my business?

Who has said these things to me or where have I heard them?

How did I come to engage in these behaviours?

What is my first scarcity memory?

What did I learn about money from that? What ideas or beliefs did I develop?



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Capitalism

What are some of the ways _____ shows up in my business?

- Exploitation
- Extraction
- Rush
- Scarcity
- Consumption



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White Supremacy Culture

What are some of the ways White Supremacy culture shows up in my business?

<https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>

- Perfectionism
- Sense of Urgency
- Defensiveness
- Quantity Over Quality
- Worship of the Written Word
- Paternalism
- Either/Or Thinking
- Power Hoarding
- Fear of Open Conflict
- Individualism
- Progress is Bigger, More
- Objectivity
- Right to Comfort



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What about clients?

How will I apply what I've learned today to interactions with clients:

- Inside myself?

- With the client?



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