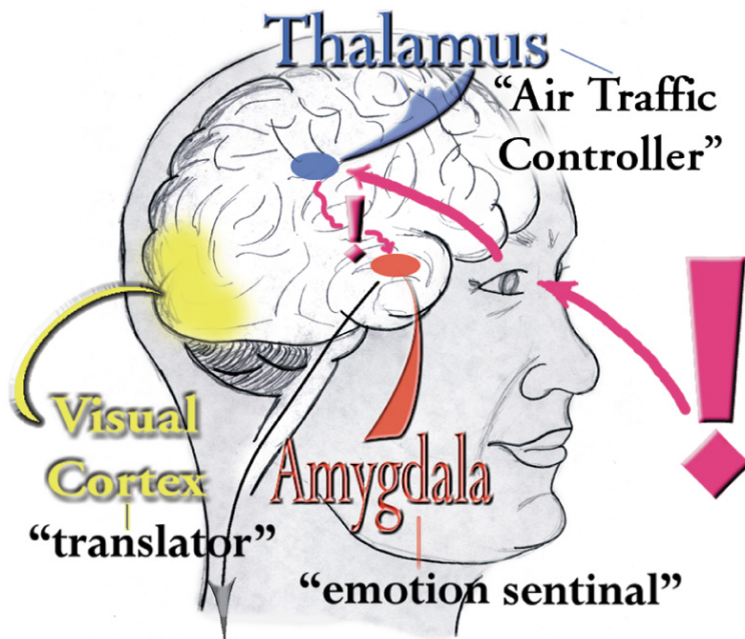


Hijacking

By Joshua Freedman

This is what happens in your brain when you get really mad -- or really anything!

The routes from sensation to action are depicted in this brain. The journey begins with sensation -- in this case vision -- which is routed to the thalamus. The thalamus acts as "air traffic controller" to keep the signals moving. In a typical situation, the thalamus directs the impulse to the cortex -- in this case the visual cortex -- for processing. The cortex "thinks" about the impulse and makes sense. "Aha," it says, "this is an exclamation



mark! It means I should get excited." That signal is then sent to the amygdala (ah-mig´dah-lah) where a flood of peptides and hormones are released to create emotion and action.

Under threat (at least the perception thereof), the thalamus has a different reaction. Like any skilled air traffic controller, the thalamus can quickly react to potential threat. In that case, it bypasses the cortex -- the thinking brain -- and the signal goes straight to the amygdala. The amygdala can only react based on previously stored patterns. This process was articulated by Joseph LeDoux in *The Emotional Brain*, and then well explained by Dan Goleman as "The Hijacking of the Amygdala."

Sometimes this kind of reaction can save our lives. More frequently it leads us to say something harmful, to escalate the situation, or even to violence.



To minimize the damage from hijacking, it is important to practice patterns that lead to de-escalation.

From that hijacked state, that condition where your brain is flooded with electro-chemicals, you still have options. You do not need to stay hijacked -- you still can choose actions. After all, the chemicals do not persist -- they will dissipate in three to six seconds.

The remedy is to 1) slow down, and 2) practice patterns that do not escalate. It turns out that in about six seconds, the cortical brain can catch up and create a conscious, thoughtful response. So, we need a Six Second Pause!

For the Six Second Pause to work, the brain has to focus on cortical thinking. So, six seconds of math, foreign language, analysis, or other high-order thinking will be most effective. Then, once your pause button has become "too easy," you'll create a new one to keep your cognitive brain engaged.

Some examples of a "Six Seconds Pause" include:

1. Name six of the seven dwarfs in alphabetical order.
2. Identify six bands whose names begin with the letter "b."
3. List six of your favorite movie characters and the films they were in.
4. Think of six exotic locales where you would like to do an EQ training.

(your turn!)

5. _____

6. _____

