



influencer

A PERSONAL SUCCESS STORY

## Surviving the Daily Commute

I cannot express how much of a difference this has made in my daily commute . . .

It was not easy, but I gave myself the time to figure

it out, had confidence I could figure it out, and kept trying.

– **Sheryl Brining**, Bethesda, MD



**P**reviously, my driving philosophy was as follows: anyone who drove slower than me was stupid and anyone who drove faster than me was an idiot. So obviously, I was a very unhappy driver.

Several months ago, I decided I did not want to lose my temper—wave my arms, yell words I would not say to my grandmother, or hit the horn in impatience—when confronted with “stupid drivers.”

I started keeping track of when I lost my temper by tracking my angry outbursts. I kept paper and pencil handy, and as soon as I parked, I documented my behavior. I promised to be honest in documenting these incidences by not make excuses for my behavior.

**“Although I am not perfect, I know exactly what I need to do when the behavioral signs of temper emerge. I can quickly respond, put my attention elsewhere, and prevent unwanted outcomes.”**

— Sheryl B.

As I tracked my behavior, I identified several areas for improvement. I found I get angry when I am hurrying, when I've worked a long day, when I am tired, when

I am driving to or from work, and when no one else can hear me. Looking at this list, I searched for vital behaviors—specific behaviors that, if changed, would positively influence road rage.

After several weeks of targeting different behaviors, I had made little progress. At that point, I knew I had not yet identified the right vital behaviors that would support the long-lasting change I desired. Then, I remembered the “Marshmallow Experiment” from Influencer Training where the young children were left alone with one marshmallow and told that if they did not eat the marshmallow, they would get a second marshmallow. The successful children found creative ways to avoid looking at the first marshmallow that sat so invitingly on the plate in front of them—they played with their hands, looked around the room, and did many other things to distract themselves.

I realized that when I drove, I did what the unsuccessful kids did. I focused on the “stupid driver” in front of me. Now I had

identified the vital behavior I needed to change: stop focusing on the car and focus on something else.

Since I have adopted this vital behavior, it has been very easy to change my reactions. Although I am not perfect, I know exactly what I need to do when the behavioral signs of temper emerge. I can quickly respond, put my attention elsewhere, and prevent unwanted outcomes.

I cannot express how much of a difference this has made in my daily commute. I am also much more aware of other behaviors I need to change, and can change with a simple shift in the focus of my attention. The key was identifying the vital behavior. It was not easy, but I gave myself the time to figure it out, had confidence I could figure it out, and kept trying.

## About VitalSmarts

*An innovator in corporate training and organizational performance, VitalSmarts helps teams and organizations achieve the results they care about most. With award-winning training products based on more than 30 years of ongoing research, VitalSmarts has helped more than 300 of the Fortune 500 realize significant results using a proven method for driving rapid, sustainable and measurable change in behaviors. VitalSmarts has been ranked twice by Inc. magazine as one of the fastest-growing companies in America and has taught more than 2 million people worldwide.*

*VitalSmarts is home to multiple training offerings, including Crucial Conversations®, Crucial Confrontations®, and Influencer Training™. Each course improves key organizational outcomes by focusing on high-leverage skills and strategies. The VitalSmarts authors have written three New York Times bestsellers, Influencer, Crucial Conversations and Crucial Confrontations. VitalSmarts also offers on-site consulting, research, executive team development, and speaking engagements.*

[www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)