

Don't Turn This Into Something

"You don't have to turn this into something. It doesn't have to upset you. Things can't shape our decisions by themselves."

Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 6.52

It was about twenty minutes before the eight-hour control room team training session. The manager sat at the back of the large room at a table with the other SCADA personnel. I have known him awhile since we have worked on SCADA-related procedures and practices. When he saw me, he yelled out, "I'm here, what are you going to teach me?" How would you react to that question? I know how I wanted to react, but I had a full day ahead in a room filled with reluctant learners.

I walked back to the table, told the person I was glad he was present, and asked him to encourage his SCADA personnel to engage with the controllers and field personnel during the session. Whether he did or not, I do not know. What I do know is that, at least that time, I did not get upset. I did not turn his remarks into something.

I recall a session with another company a year earlier when some technical experts offered comments about how ridiculous the team training was to them. I did get upset and engaged one of them in an argument. The result was my stress increased. This caused my blood pressure to rise and I started sweating profusely. One of my colleagues even started planning what to do if I had some type of health related event.

One of the company managers expressed concern and asked if I was all right. I was not all right, and physically felt the effects of the episode for a week, eventually going to the doctor. Mentally and emotionally, I felt the effects longer. I turned the comments into something that day. It is embarrassing to recall my reaction and a bit frightening to recall the results.

These are two separate events, separated by about 12 months. What shaped my decisions? What would you do in similar circumstances? What do you do in situations when something happens that could be upsetting? What contributes to unhealthy reactions? If things cannot shape our decisions by themselves, what does shape our decisions?

Looking back, at least three of the "Dirty Dozen Causes of Errors and Accidents" affected me in the first event: Fatigue, Stress, and Pressure. I had only slept about three hours and had an early commute in traffic. We had technical difficulties getting set up for the session and was late getting started. It bothers me when we do not start on time. This was the first session we were doing with the company, so I felt pressure for it to go very well.

I am not transferring responsibility for the effects of the event to those who made the comments. I cast no blame. They had their actions and I had my reaction. I turned it into something and got upset, and made a decision that hurt me.

Do not be like me. Do not turn what others say into something that upsets you. I have lived long enough to know how to react in positive ways even though I do not always react in positive ways. That is why I continue studying philosophy. One day I hope to do better.