

Paper Tiger:

This lesson explains the “Paper Tiger” phenomenon. A “paper tiger” is a fake threat, something like a test or a deadline. If you were to be attacked by a real tiger, your limbic system, or “lizard brain,” would kick in and trigger the fight, flight, or freeze response, which keeps you alive. However, if you’re attacked by a paper tiger, the same response still takes place, even though the threat isn’t a real one or a life-threatening one.

This is the problem with the limbic system, specifically the amygdala - it can’t tell the difference between a real threat and a perceived threat. A real tiger or a paper one. A test or project could trigger the same response that a life-threatening situation, such as a tiger attack, could get.

I know that when I am faced with a paper tiger, in that moment, I feel as if this threat could change my life. But in reality - and especially when I look back at it - those threats were mere paper tigers, instead of the real tiger I had been envisioning at the time. Mindfulness can help you see in perspective while experiencing the paper tiger, and let you see that it is in fact a paper tiger, not a real one.

