

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 183: HOW TO KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS FROM MESSING UP YOUR BUSINESS

Think about all the decisions that are impacted by your emotions: Doing a scary thing, you feel fear - is this a sign you shouldn't do it? Getting a grumpy email from a customer - do you react with anger? Or with shame? How does that impact the e-mail you send in response?

Emotions are part of a healthy life, and I'm a big believer in FEELING your feelings, not just shoving them down or ignoring them. They can shine a light on what's going on and what you need to do or stop doing. When they're ignored, or when you act on them unthinkingly, you can really mess up your business! You can lash out or hide or give up entirely, depending on what your emotions tell you.

Welcome to Explore Your Enthusiasm, episode 183. Today we're going to talk about the research around how emotions are made, and how you can use that to make better decisions in your business.

To understand how to keep them from screwing up your business or reacting rashly, let's look at how emotions are made. To understand that, I wanna share with you what I learned from the book, [How Emotions are Made](#), by Lisa Feldman Barrett, PhD. She's done so much research on emotions and the brain and how emotions actually form. Realizing all the pieces that go into making an emotion, can help you understand how to work with your emotions.

First, we gotta get on the same page: the author's argument (and her research seems to back this up) is that emotions are CONSTRUCTED not automatic. I know it feels automatic: I got a mean e-mail, I'm mad! I have to stand in front of an audience, I'm scared! But these emotions are actually constructs based on our own concepts, interoceptive, hypotheses and experiences. This is why not everyone has the same reaction to the same stimulus and why your anger might look very different than your partner's anger.

Concepts - Our personal understanding of something. Your concepts are the primary tool for your brain to guess the meaning of incoming sensory inputs. So you when you see this cup, you've got a concept for cup and you don't have to consciously think about what a cup is and what a cup does and what you know about cups. Your concept "cup" shortens that process.

Ex. I had a client years ago who didn't want to feel EXCITED. When she was excited about a project it had an element of stress, anxiety. Her concept of "excitement" was tinged with pressure and a kind of manic energy. Now, you can go to therapy about why that is, but for our purposes, it's just good to know. That's in part why I talk about enthusiasm. My concept of enthusiasm is all fun.

This means that "emotions" aren't universal. Yes, we all likely feel the same feeling, but we call them different things, and beyond that they MEAN or signify different things for us.

A lot of this is cultural - studies have shown that if your culture doesn't have a word for a specific feeling, you don't recognize HAVING that feeling.

So our words + culture matter. Our words shape our concepts. And our concepts shape how we interpret experiences and feelings.

Ex, my concept of fear could = clenched tummy and sweaty skin = OH NO PANIC something unsafe is happening. But your concept of excitement = clenched tummy and sweaty skin = YAY! Excitement!

Of course, a lot of how we translate this is based on what else is going on. If you feel that feeling on a dark street at night, you're going to look for a concept of "dark street at night" and end up identifying fear. If you're riding a roller coaster, you'll take those same feelings and identify fun! excitement! Wheee!

We have a few things impacting what emotions we identify feeling:

1. Concept of what emotions are, and what circumstances mean, shaped by our culture and our language
2. Assessing the situation we're in, and looking for examples in our past of similar situations
3. Interoception - feeling on the inside of your body. Identifying that clenched tummy.
Ex. - Your tummy clenches - interoceptive network is how you actually feel that. But what it MEANS is a hypothesis. Your brain is making hypothesis all the time - what does that feeling MEAN? It looks at a bunch of data and looks for a concept that matches.

There's an important thing to note here: this process of interoception and making a hypothesis about what it means - it's faulty. It relies on your body budget to be in balance to work right. So your body budget is your balance of hormones (like stress hormones, reproductive hormones, emotion hormones) and if it's out of whack, your interoception is out of whack.

For example, if you haven't slept, you have more cortisol in your system, and cortisol makes your heart race and your breathing shorten. Your brain then hypothesizes that with your racing heart and shortness of breath, you're feeling stressed or panicky. But this happens all across your system, with all kinds of hormones and related bodily reactions.

What your interoceptive network is trying to do is keep you healthy, to keep your body budget in balance - to be sure you stay safe and avoid danger

So let's look at how all these things work together to create emotions:

1. We feel something via interoception.
2. Our brain receives those signals and signals from the outside world, the situation we're in right now.
3. It looks for concepts that fit this: What similar situations + similar bodily feelings = ??? Of course, it may make an attribution error. The bodily feeling may have nothing to do with the situation or circumstance, it could be totally unrelated
4. We feel an emotion. Oh, clenched stomach and standing in front of a classroom, I must be a little nervous. Clenched stomach and I just ate sushi - I might have food poisoning.

The important thing to realize is: these are just hypotheses. And our brain is great at making hypothesis and not great at adjusting them.

So if you, like me, felt massive stomach cramps the first dozen times you ever had to give a presentation in front of the classroom, you looked for a concept of what this meant and probably landed on "stage fright".

But if you decided instead that this could mean "excitement and bravery", by changing your hypothesis you then change the emotion you feel...and that leads to different actions.

Knowing all that - what can you do to manage your emotions? So that the emotions you feel don't make you bad decisions or derail where you wanna go?

THE BOOK HOW EMOTIONS ARE MADE HAS SOME SUGGESTIONS.

The first, I'll be honest, kinda annoyed me. It's so basic.

Keep your body budget in balance. As the author puts it "the science is crystal clear on health food, exercise and sleep as prerequisites for a balanced body budget and healthy emotional life." So if you feel like your emotions are running away with you, check in with your body - have you slept? Ate well? Moved?

This is also the place that essential oils, massages, yoga, and other self care practices can come in - you help balance your body budget by taking CARE of your body.

I'm gonna talk more about how to use essential oils to keep your body in balance and manage your emotions in a free workshop tomorrow, Thursday November 16. You can sign up at TaraSwiger.com/eo.

Next, you can impact your emotional wellbeing by working on your emotional concepts. You can create new concepts by learning new words for emotions. As Feldman Barrett says:

"IT FOLLOWS DIRECTLY FROM NEUROSCIENCE OF CONSTRUCTION. WORDS SEED YOUR CONCEPTS, YOUR CONCEPTS DRIVE YOUR PREDICTIONS, PREDICTIONS REGULAR YOUR BODY BUDGET AND YOUR BODY BUDGET DETERMINES HOW YOU FEEL. THEREFORE, THE MORE FINELY-GRAINED YOUR VOCABULARY, THE MORE PRECISELY YOUR PREDICTING BRAIN CAN CALIBRATE YOUR BUDGET TO YOUR BODY'S NEEDS. IN FACT, PEOPLE WHO EXHIBIT HIGHER EMOTIONAL GRANULARITY GO THE DOCTOR LESS FREQUENTLY, USE MEDICATION LESS FREQUENTLY AND SPEND FEW DAYS HOSPITALIZED FOR ILLNESS."

So learn new words, read new books, listen or watch new things!

Another suggestion is one we've talked about already: Re-categorization. The more concepts you know, the more effectively you can re-categorize or reframe the experience to regulate your behavior.

You can learn more about reframing in episode 115: <https://taraswiger.com/podcast115/>

I hope that this helps you recognize that your emotions are constructed, that you have some choice in the matter, and that you can make better decisions by taking better care of yourself! I'd love to hear what you think! Post your projects and your thoughts on Instagram with the hashtag #exploreyourenthusiasm and leave a review on iTunes or a comment on the YouTube video!