

# TUNE YOUR EMOTIONAL PROCESSING

## WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF IT?

- The good.
  - You act decisively on your problems.
    - This makes you feel empowered and good about your life.
  - You recover from bad moods quickly.
    - If you are disturbed by painful or sad thoughts, it's only because there's an actual good reason for their continued salience.
  - You can easily focus and do productive work.
    - It's so much easier when you aren't getting caught in unproductive thought loops, anxiety spirals etc.
- The bad.
  - You are forced to face your demons, and deal with them.
    - While this is ultimately very beneficial, the process of getting there might be rough depending on your starting point.

## HOW TO TELL IF YOU HAVE IT?

*Note: this is a medium-difficulty skill. You are likely to already have it to some degree, with lots of room for improvement.*

- You don't have any nagging thoughts or memories.
  - It means literally zero of them.
  - What is this thing you did a long time ago that you are still embarrassed about?
    - If something comes up at this kind of query, that memory requires more processing.
- Analyzing your past experiences feels pleasant.
  - You treat it as an opportunity to learn important life lessons, and find out all sorts of interesting stuff. There should be no anxiety about bringing up whichever slice of your life.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

- First, some background.
  - You can roughly model your brain as using two different types of thinking, the conscious / deliberative / sequential type and subconscious / intuitive / parallel type (often referred to as System 1 and System 2, or "rider and elephant").
    - The distinction between these two is much more blurry than it might seem at first sight, but it's good enough for the purpose of this explanation.
  - There are several important brain functions that are mostly exclusive to conscious/deliberative thought:
    - Communicating with people verbally (doing the "public relations").
    - Preparing complex plans and strategies (especially those which require multiple steps to be done for the first time ever).
    - Tweaking other brain functions to perform better.
  - However, System 2 (deliberative thought) tends to overestimate its own importance.
    - This is not an accident, it is very adaptive from an evolutionary perspective to think and speak *as if* our conscious/deliberative thoughts were indeed very important, and in control of our lives.
    - Instead of "rider and elephant" you'd do better with a metaphor such as "elephant and its trunk", or something else which emphasizes that deliberative thought is just one of many functions and modules that are essential to healthy functioning of the whole brain.
  - The experiences "you" are "conscious of" are exactly the ones that are essential to perform the functions listed above, no more and no less.
    - For example, "you" are not conscious of real motives of your behavior.
    - In other words, the things you are conscious of are *essential information that is needed to do your job*, if you imagine yourself as a component of your brain.
      - They are definitely not there for you to passively enjoy (like an exposition in a museum) or have an existential crisis about.
      - At least, not if you want your brain to work without glitches!
  - The last thing you want to do is attempting to control everything your brain does. It not only doesn't work, it also creates a divide between your

conscious intentions and behavior, which ultimately causes you to *lose* control.

- On the contrary, if you keep doing only those things which *are* your job, and doing them well, you will ultimately become more integrated and in control.
- If it's still unclear, consider this metaphor:
  - You are an employee in a small company (your brain).
  - Your job is consumer support, and you are the only person responsible for answering the phone.
  - You regularly get tasks to do (emotions) from your boss.
    - Sometimes these tasks come with documentation (memories, mental images etc.).
    - In case the instructions are unclear, as they often are, you can request more information ([Gendlin's Focusing](#)).
    - If you gathered enough respect and trust, you can also assign tasks to other employees.
  - Are you a good employee, or a bad one?
    - A good employee:
      - Finishes tasks quickly and well (the "emotional inbox" is empty).
      - Communicates with other employees, and knows what's going on in the company.
      - Gives accurate information to customers (other people), and their expectations are realistic.
      - Has no reason to be embarrassed when someone learns about the internal workings of the company.
      - The company delivers with excellent quality, and can afford to spend resources on keeping all employees happy.
    - A bad employee:
      - Ignores all but most urgent tasks, and always has a pile of unfinished work.
      - Develops a fear of looking at the inbox.
      - Has no idea about what other employees are doing, and is constantly surprised by it.
      - Has illusions about being very important and in control, despite being the most useless employee by far.

- Often has to make up information on the spot when talking to customers.
- This puts a lot of pressure on the other employees, and they become resentful.
- When some aspect of the company is in the public eye, there is panic all around, and no one can do their job properly because they are busy pretending reality is something it is not.
- The company fails to deliver across the board.

## HOW TO LEARN IT?

- Before you start.
  - Make sure you have a skill equivalent to [Gendlin's Focusing](#). Many people already have it to some degree, but it doesn't hurt to be better at it!
- Step 1.
  - Pick some emotion that you experienced recently, or are experiencing at the moment.
    - If you've been a "bad employee" a lot, pick something easy to get off to a good start (a recent, not very strong emotion).
  - Fully understand the purpose behind that emotion.
    - If the emotion is a task to do, what would it mean to do it really well?
      - Is there a lesson to be learned?
      - Is there something you didn't seem to know about yourself?
      - Is there something that you should simply go and do out there in the world?
      - Why do you think you'd be asked to do it?
    - Don't judge the emotion, and don't judge yourself for having it! It's important documentation for your task, treat it accordingly.
      - This is also true for "negative" emotions. Do not forbid yourself from feeling shame, fear, disgust, frustration, disappointment, or even hate.
      - Every emotion is important information, and getting rid of the emotion doesn't mean you get rid of the underlying problem!
      - A common mistake here is to think that if you never experience negative emotions about other people, it will somehow automatically

make you a kind person. But what *actually* happens is that it makes you a person who *doesn't know that they are not kind*.

- If you have trouble coming up with answers, repeat a process similar to [Gendlin's Focusing](#) until you have some answer that is satisfying.
- Step 2.
  - Make plans and act of them.
    - Especially if you don't have much trust as an "employee" in your brain, you'll need to prove your worth with actions not just words.
    - In many cases, the "plan" will be something very simple, so don't get stuck on thinking too much. Often, just keeping your emotions in mind will already be enough to shift your actions in a good direction.
  - When you think the task is done, repeat the process of questioning, to make sure that you really nailed it.
    - This is crucial, and you can't make progress until you get to the bottom of this!
      - If you have a bad track record, be extra careful in order to gradually regain some "trust" of other parts of your brain.
    - Sometimes you'll feel that the task is too much, and you absolutely cannot deal with it at this time.
      - Try to switch to some smaller part of it, and make a little bit of real progress.
      - If this fails too, at the very least make sure that the problem is not *getting even worse* while you aren't looking at it.
        - This is *very* important! Tasks that feel impossible are exactly the ones that matter the most for your life.
        - Distancing yourself from emotions is never a solution, and eventually the problem will catch up with you. The longer you wait, the worse it'll be when it does.
      - After you ensure this, you might have no other choice but to set this task aside for a while. Keep doing other tasks, and eventually you'll become strong enough to return.
  - In some cases, this will be enough to remove this item from your "emotional inbox". If that is the case, lucky you! Go back to Step 1 and repeat with the next emotion/task.
- Step 3.

- In other cases, even after doing all you possibly could, there is still some negative emotion about the whole thing.
  - This tends to happen with items that have spent a long time lying around neglected. It's as if instead of one e-mail from your boss in your inbox, you have fifteen of them, all asking you to do the same thing.
  - If some thoughts are often happening together with negative emotions, they become associated by pure exposure.
  - In this case, it is safe to simply let go of the negativity.
- Bring up the negative emotion, and associated memories.
  - At this point, they should have lost most of the sting, so it's not as bad as you'd expect!
  - Sit with the emotion and try to "tell" it that there's no longer anything there to feel strongly about.
    - Or is there? Be honest! This won't work unless you've really done your job well.
  - It often helps to focus on your body and use some relaxation technique.
    - You probably know best what is relaxing for you.
    - If you don't have any ideas, try to simply take 10 deep breaths.
- Repeat until you feel a definite lack of emotional disturbance about that particular topic/event/memory.
  - The job can actually feel pretty good, can't it? It is only hard if you make it hard for yourself!
  - Move on to the next task.

## FURTHER PROGRESS

- There's always more you can learn about your emotions, and about yourself.
  - Remember that you *don't* already know it! You have an *impression* of knowing it, but this impression is not accurate.
    - It is only there because it's useful to seem to *other people* as if you knew!
    - You can't learn if you think you already know.
- A higher level of this skill is trying to overperform at your job so much, that you do most tasks before you are asked to do them.
  - This results in a spectacularly clear mind, and also in a spectacularly successful life.

- If you get a small prompt (the inkling of an emotion) to do something, try to make a big deal out of it!
  - There's probably more to it, and you'll have to do it at some point, so why don't do it right now?
  - Note that this is only for advanced levels. If you have this attitude while your "emotional inbox" is still cluttered, you'll just be overwhelmed and make your situation worse.
- When your emotional processing is on track, you'll gain the freedom to sometimes take a refreshing vacation from it, as in [Pause Your Feedback Loops](#).

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