A person with long hair

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How to Avoid Doing

Something You’ll Regret

September 19, 2021

Well hello Friends! I hope you guys had an amazing week.

Today I want to talk about something that I believe we can all relate to whether it’s in our career or life. And that’s **Doing Something We Later Regret**. And specifically, today we’re going to talk about how to AVOID that going forward.

So first, can you relate to this?

I know I CERTAINLY can.

Most everyone can.

I mean, there are so many ways this can come up for us in our career and in our personal lives too.

First, we live in an intaworld right now.

So, there’s this expectation that if we send out an email or IM with a question or a request that we’re going to get an INSTANT response.

And many times, there’s an expectation that this is a 24 x 7 thing. Either we have that expectation for ourselves or maybe we have a boss or colleagues that expect it. So, evenings, middle of the night, weekends. Maybe we’re always on.

So, in this case, all it takes is an email that hits us wrong when we’re tired or even worse, maybe out with friends…maybe we’ve had a cocktail or two and suddenly BOOM! we’re throwing caution to the wind and dashing off an email that might reflect what we feel in that specific moment but may not be the BEST thing we could do for our career or relationship.

Or maybe you’re someone that HIDES what you’re really thinking or feeling. You keep things to yourself and so you simmer and stew and ruminate about it instead of finding a way to raise the issue at the right time and place or in the best, most constructive way.

You can only do this for so long until eventually, all those bottled-up thoughts and emotions are going to come exploding out – usually at a less than ideal time or in a way that doesn’t serve you.

Or maybe you’re someone who’s very in-the-moment.

So, you express every thought and feeling you have in the moment you have it – because it makes you feel better. Instead of considering the best way to express yourself or raise the issue.

That sets you up for feeling regret later because once things are said they can’t be unsaid. They might be forgiven or not…but they can’t be taken back.

And there are so many other ways this might come up for us. In our career. In our life. In our relationships. Whatever.

But what I want to do now is focus on what all these things have in common.

Because whether you shoot off an in-the-moment response, bottle things up until you explode or express every thought you have in the moment you have it, they all have ONE thing in common.

And that is it’s about how our human brain works.

Because when we do things we regret, it’s about brain science. Not personal flaws.

And that’s why I wanted to talk about this today.

Because so many times, we really DO think we have a fatal flaw. That there’s just something wrong with us. That we can’t HELP ourselves. That have a fiery temper. Or we’re just an impatient person. Or we’re just direct. Or confrontational. Or whatever.

But what I want to tell you is that while those may very well be patterns that you HAVE. They are not WHO YOU ARE.

They are patterns of behavior that you have because of programmed patterns of thought that have developed over time. If you want to know more about this, check out episode 25 on Thought Pathways. That’s where we go deep on how our brain works in terms of recurring patterns of thought.

In general, here’s how the cycle works.

Something happens.

We get an email we don’t like, or we have a less than ideal meeting, or someone says or does something we don’t like.

And our brain will INSTANTLY have a thought about that thing.

That THOUGHT is what causes the emotion we feel.

The EMOTION we feel inspires the actions we take or don’t take.

And the actions we take or don’t take deliver the RESULTS that we get.

This is how our brain works. All day every day.

That’s not how we believe it works though.

We BELIEVE that something happens.

And we think that the thing that happens causes us to FEEL the emotions we feel and get the results we get.

Most of us aren’t aware that we even HAD the thought. Because our brain works so fast.

Neuroscientists say the average human brain has about 60,000 thoughts a day. However, many we have, the important thing to know is that your brain is always running. Fast. Like a turbo charged computer processor.

So, most of the time, we’re not consciously aware of the thoughts we have. They’re just running below the surface.

That can be an issue at times because it’s the THOUGHTS we have that set-in motion everything in our lives. It’s the point of power for us.

If we’re not aware of our thoughts, not directing those. Then we’re running on auto pilot. We’re not purposefully directing our life.

So, you might be wondering, well if I have 60,000 thoughts a day, how CAN I direct them all.

The answer is you don’t need to.

It would be impossible to try. Our brain just works too fast.

But here’s when you know you need to gain some awareness into what you’re thinking.

It’s by being aware of what you’re FEELING.

Because if you’re feeling frustrated or angry or impatient or pissed or attacked or belittled or diminished or any other negative emotion, that’s when it’s important to get some clarity on what you’re thinking.

Why?

Because that emotion didn’t JUST HAPPEN. It wasn’t caused by the situation or the bad email or the challenging meeting or interaction.

It happened because of what you’re THINKING about that thing.

A thought your brain served up – one you may or may not even be aware of – is what caused you to FEEL the emotion you’re feeling.

Not the email you received. Not the IM. Not the passive aggressive comment.

So, it starts with staying clear on the emotions you feel. And if they’re emotions that are more negative in nature, you know that you’re potentially vulnerable to doing or saying something you might later regret.

Because we do all the things, we do because of how we feel.

Next, when you’re feeling those negative emotions ask yourself what you THINK or BELIEVE about what just happened.

Now what’s important here is that your brain will tell you that it’s not a thought that caused how you feel. That it’s the thing that just happened.

Most of us will believe this to be true.

We’ll think that the situations or things that happen cause all our frustrations or anger or whatever.

But they don’t. We cause our emotions by how we choose to think about the things that happen to us.

So, get clear on what you think or believe about the thing that just happened.

Ask yourself if this is a thought that you want to have. A thought that’s going to serve you or lead to the outcomes you want in your career or life.

If the answer is no, then choose a new thought that will.

Now this is usually where my clients will go into tilt. They’ll says things like “but that person was so rude to me” or “they totally derailed that meeting” or “they made me look bad” or whatever. And they’ll be like “Am I just supposed to pretend that didn’t happen or that it’s okay?”

No.

Pretending or putting a falsely positive spin on something that you feel is negative isn’t what this is about.

It’s not always about channeling positivity. Sometimes it’s just about getting to neutral.

It’s about selecting a new thought you might want to think like “guess xyz person was having a bad day” or “I’m going to schedule a follow-up meeting for next week so we can address these issues head on” or “I’ll make sure that next time, I think through all the possible objections so I’m ready for pushback.”

Those new thoughts aren’t about pretending the unfortunate thing didn’t happen. They’re about shifting your focus from blaming and victimization and powerlessness to putting you right back in the driver’s seat.

Because at the end of the day, who knows what thoughts people are having that cause THEM to do the things they do. We can’t know that, and it really doesn’t matter anyway.

Because we can’t control what other people choose to do.

All we can do is ensure WE CHOOSE to stay out of responding to others and instead focus on steering our own future.

But all of this takes awareness.

So, what do you do the next time you get an email or IM zinger…

Or the next time that colleague is throwing up roadblocks in a meeting…

Or the next time someone says something that causes your blood pressure to rise…

The first thing you need to do is NOT RESPOND in that instant.

Because remember, if you do, you’ll just be responding based on whatever emotions you’re feeling and if they’re not emotions that serve you – like anger or irritation or impatience or rage or defensiveness or whatever – you’re probably going to do and say things you’ll later regret.

Here’s what to do instead.

1. Don’t respond in that instant. Instead…

If you’re in a meeting, say you’ll take the issue offline and look into it and will follow-up with the team later. Then move on to the next item.

Or if it’s an email or IM, don’t respond until you have time to gather yourself.

Or if it’s a live interaction with a friend or a colleague or your boss or your partner or whatever, choose a thought in that moment that brings you to neutral. Maybe something like “They have a right to think and feel what they do and it’s okay if I don’t feel the same, I’m going to listen.” You can then come back and address it later when you have had time to gather yourself.

1. When you have 15 minutes alone, get clear on the emotion that came up for you.
2. Then ask yourself what you were thinking or believing about the thing that happened, what was said, the person’s motivations, whatever.
3. Then, choose a new thought you DECIDE to think that will at least take you to neutral in terms of emotions. And here, remember, it’s not about pretending or whatever, but it’s about keeping the focus on YOU and what YOU can control. That doesn’t mean the person DIDN’T intend to hurt you or derail the meeting or whatever. It just means that you don’t have to respond to it. Taking it to neutral means, maybe acknowledging that they were having a bad day. But it also usually means focusing on what YOU want to think or do in response so that you operate from a place where your emotions are in control and your actions are intentional or serve you.

This is a lot different from how our busy lives work today isn’t it?

We live in a world where everything is instant and always on.

So, it’s sooooooooo easy to assume that our responses to those things have to be the same.

And what I want you to know today is that when you operate that way, you’re probably going to end up doing some things that you’ll later regret.

That doesn’t mean you have to spend your whole life trying to control what you’re thinking and feeling.

But it DOES mean that we need to stay in touch with what we feel.

And when things happen and we’re aware that we’re having a negative response, it’s important to stop, get clear on what we’re feeling and the thought that’s causing it. And then DECIDE what we want to think instead.

The more you do this, the quicker and more intuitive it’ll be.

Your emotions are the clue that you might be about to do something you regret.

Your thoughts are the key to changing that.

Once you learn how to shift your focus and your thoughts back to the things YOU can control or whatever, that’s when you truly step into the most powerful place in your career or life.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.