Text

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Taking Charge of Your Feelings

January 9, 2022

Well hello Friends!

I hope you guys had an amazing week and I hope your new year is off to a great start.

Today I was originally going to talk about something else, but in the past week I had several coaching clients that were all struggling with how they feel about their job or career. Apparently, there was something about being off for a week or two around the holiday and then suddenly being back to work on January 3rd that triggered it.

For some, the abrupt shift from days of leisure to the 9-5 structure that caused them to feel unfocused and overwhelmed.

For others, being back in the routine was a harsh reminder that they don’t like their job or their career path or their business much anymore. (And yes, much as many corporate types might fantasize about it, even successful entrepreneurs sometimes struggle with not liking or being into what they do anymore).

And because this was such a pervasive theme AND because I keep seeing all the headlines around record job resignations, I wanted to talk today about ‘taking charge of your feelings.’

Now before we get into it, I have a little disclaimer. This is not about pretending to feel positive when you really feel crappy. That isn’t true and it doesn’t work. This is learning how to take control of your emotional health. And it’s super helpful whether you’re someone who struggles with impatience (like I used to), if you tend toward pessimism or self-doubt or judgement or defensiveness or insecurity.

And by the way, we all do at times. So, I think this is going to be super helpful for everyone in both their career and life, so let’s dive in.

Before we get into what’s behind our emotions or mood, let’s talk about the impact our emotions have on well everything. Our life, our relationships, our performance, our health. All of it.

And for this, a super helpful tool is called The Mood Elevator.

It was developed by Larry Senn, a leading organizational development consultant. And he’s written a book by the same name, so if you find this concept of interest you might want to check it out.

As an overview, this is a visual tool that looks at our emotional state like an elevator with different floors. On the lower floors are things like impatience, pessimism, irritation, worry, anxiety, burnout, stress, defensiveness, insecurity.

And on the upper floors are things like gratitude, creativity, resourcefulness, hopefulness, optimism, humor, patience, understanding.

The idea with the Mood Elevator is to first understand the relationship between the “level” of your mood and your behavior or performance. And then to learn how to elevate your mood to a ‘higher’ floor if needed.

Because if you’re on the lower floors of that elevator and feeling things like anxiety, stress, insecurity or irritation you can see how that will impact what you do and how you show up around others. It might affect the things you say, how you interact with others, how you treat yourself maybe by overeating or not sleeping or whatever. It might also be the catalyst behind other unhelpful behaviors like procrastination, perfectionism, fear and hiding.

On the other hand, if you’re on the upper floors and feeling things like patience, understanding, gratitude and optimism, you can see how that would have you showing up completely differently. Your relationships with others would thrive. Your productivity and work quality would be great. And you’re likely to stay on plan when it comes to your self-care.

The idea basically is to stay out of the mood basement and get to a higher mood floor.

Now you might be thinking “well that’s interesting but how do I do that?”

It’s a good question. Because most people don’t think our emotions, or our mood can be influenced. We think they just happen.

And we all ride the mood elevator every day. Here’s how it can go.

Like maybe we get out of bed and feel like we’re on a middle floor. We’re not overly optimistic about the day ahead, but we’re not dreading it either. S

So, we get ready for our day and then maybe we spill something all over our blouse 1 minute before the Zoom meeting starts. Or we get an IM from a co-worker about a lost deal.

Suddenly we’re on the bottom floor. We’re irritated. Disappointed and maybe a little anxious.

Or maybe we start off the day in the basement, dreading two of the meetings on our calendar. But then we get an unexpected call from the boss saying the big project you proposed was approved. Suddenly you zoom to the upper floors, feeling hopeful, appreciative, and optimistic.

And that’s the thing. Most of us believe that where we are on the Mood Elevator depends on what’s going on outside us. With the boss. With our co-workers. With the politics. With our clients. Or whatever.

But it’s not. Our emotions or mood is 100% related to what we’re thinking.

And that’s good news because it means that how we feel is not outside our control or the productive of the random things that happen around us. It’s about how we are thinking and specifically what we are thinking about the things that happen around us.

As we’ve talked about before on this podcast, I was trained in a cognitive behavioral coaching approach. This is derived from a discipline of psychology that’s about identifying underlying patterns of thought that get programmed into our mind and become the unconscious default our brain will go to in certain circumstances.

And the key to this coaching approach is understanding that our thoughts (whether conscious or unconscious) determine what we feel which in turn drives what we do or don’t do which in turn delivers the results we get.

Because our brain works so fast – neuroscientists say we have up to 60,000 thoughts a day – most are unconscious. We probably aren’t aware of most. But what we always ARE aware of is how we feel.

And your current emotional state – where you are on the mood elevator – is the key to knowing, in the moment, whether you are thinking something that’s serving you or not.

If you’re feeling an emotion on the bottom of the mood elevator, you can be sure you’re thinking a thought that’s causing that more negative emotion. So, if you don’t want to feel impatient or frustrated or insecure or angry, you can change it by choosing to think a different thought instead.

But here’s the important part and it’s usually what confuses my clients when they first start with this coaching approach. Shifting the thoughts from something more negative to something more productive that will raise your mood, needs to be very intentional. This isn’t about pretending that something negative is positive.

I help my clients master this through the self-coaching technique we use. In that, we use a visual tool to take a situation and map it into 5 interrelated parts: situation thoughts feelings actions and results. If you want to go deeper on this, check out episode one that describes the approach.

And when you’re trying to shift your mood from a bottom floor to an upper floor, the best way to do that is to ask yourself how what’s happening could be a positive thing or how you could choose to think of what’s happening in a different, more empathetic, or optimistic way.

To help with this, I’ll give you an example from my own career.

So…I used to be very impatient. VERY.

And while I knew that, and I was usually in touch with when I was feeling that way, before I got exposed to this cognitive coaching approach, I never really had command of it.

I truly thought I just WAS an impatient person. But as I learned to get awareness into when my impatience was triggered, I gradually came to understand that there were types of situations that would trigger unhelpful thoughts.

For example, it usually came up if I had to explain the same thing multiple times to the same people. Or, if projects or people were moving too slowly. Or if there were politics playing out across different parts of the organization that were impacting my work.

When those things would happen, I would feel the impatience or frustration rising inside me.

I didn’t like that part of myself.

But until I learned this cognitive based coaching approach, I could never shift out of it that emotion in the moment.

If it happened in an email or IM exchange, it was fine. Because I would just give myself time to respond and wait until I was no longer feeling impatient or frustrated and then I’d just patiently explain again.

But we don’t always have the luxury of time in business, right?

And so, if my impatience got triggered in a meeting, I would be aware I was feeling frustrated, but I didn’t know how to shift out of it in the moment. Because I wasn’t yet in touch with what was really triggering the impatience.

I literally thought it was about what the person was saying or doing. That it was about having to explain the thing for the 110th time. And so, I did. But everything about my approach made it really clear I was not happy about doing that.

So how did I change that?

By doing the self-coaching work I teach my clients to do. And which I do every day.

In that, I explored the types of circumstances where my impatience would get triggered. And the self-coaching helped me find the underlying thought patterns that were triggering the impatience.

Through the exploration, I realized that when I felt impatience, it was because I was thinking things like “They’re doing this on purpose” or “They’re just trying to sabotage this idea” or “They’re just being difficult.”

As I did that exploratory, I realized those were very judgmental thoughts. And they were all about me pretending to know the other person’s motivations, which of course, I couldn’t possibly know.

And while my judgments might be true. The truth is, they might also NOT be true.

So, I decided to choose some new thoughts that I would choose to think instead, whenever my impatience was triggered in the future. And those new thoughts I chose were around flexibility and curiosity.

Specifically, now when I recognize that I’m starting to feel impatient, I start with the awareness that it’s how I’m feeling.

Then I instantly shift into a different thought which is something like “I’m going to find a better way to explain this” or “How can I make this absolutely clear and free of jargon?” or “If it’s not clear on this next attempt, maybe we can discuss it offline so we can get deeper into the issue.”

You can see those new thoughts had nothing to do with judgment. Instead, they were about challenging myself to find more creative or clearer ways to explain whatever it is I needed to explain. I made it about me finding better ways to do it instead of deciding that the other person was just being difficult on purpose.

This works for everything.

So, let’s say every Monday you drag yourself out of bed, dreading another workday. You feel unmotivated, burned out. Stressed.

This is not just triggered by your job. It’s caused by how you’re thinking about your job. And specifically, what you’re dreading or not liking about your job.

You can decide that you want to think something different. Like maybe you’re grateful you have a job. Or what the challenges in the job have taught you that will help you in future. Or the things about your job that you do like. By choosing thoughts like that, you’ll shift from stress to gratitude. Or from dread to appreciation.

That doesn’t mean you’ll magically love a job you think you despise. But it could be very helpful in letting yourself feel better inside the job you have until you find one you like better.

The beautiful thing this coaching approach can teach you is how to lift on the upper floors of the mood elevator when you want to. How to stop those programmed in patterns of thought and emotion that don’t serve you and instead shifting into more productive thoughts and emotions that do.

Think of how this can impact your workday.

Think how it will affect your relationships. Even the difficult ones.

Think how it will affect how you feel about yourself!