

EMOTIONAL EQUATIONS READER GUIDE (a mini-companion to the book)

OVERVIEW. There are multiple metaphors I use in *Emotional Equations* to describe how emotions work in our lives. My favorite is the weather. Sunshine and rainstorms are not stationary and neither are our emotions. In fact, the Latin root of the word “emotion” means “to move.” Or Emotion = Energy + Motion. Emotions are vehicles for transforming or moving our lives and there are various ingredients – just like the weather has barometric pressure, humidity, and elevation – that influence our emotional states. When an emotion is stagnating and not moving through us, we find ourselves in states such as depression (think of a constant rainstorm for forty days and forty nights). This is why my favorite question to ask when I’m feeling an emotion arise in me is, “What is this emotion trying to tell me and how can it serve me?” That allows the emotion to move through me.

A metaphor I didn’t use in the book, but one that feels very familiar to me is baggage. Our luggage in life is an apt metaphor for me – a guy who’s been a hotelier for a quarter century. Countless times I’ve seen people show up at our hotel front desks with all kinds of baggage, and only some of it the physical kind. Most of us have emotional baggage that may seem invisible to the untrained eye or invisible to the person carrying the baggage. But the results of lugging that baggage around for years is noticeable in how that person shows up at the metaphorical front desk of life. I created *Emotional Equations* to help you be more aware of all the bags you’re carrying and how to open your luggage up and make sense of what’s inside.

Opening up a bag, you may find a truly messy interior with things in complete disarray. But, these equations create a certain logic to how you pack and unpack your bags and, in fact, being a little more conscious of what’s in your bag may allow you to discard a few heavy items that have been weighing you down (like metaphorical books – beliefs and ideas – that you picked up or were given to you years ago but don’t mean a thing to you today. It’s time to let go of the guilt and lighten your load. Creating your own internal logic regarding your emotional baggage will allow you to carry a lighter bag...one that’s eminently easier to unpack. So, I guess my role in both the book and this reader guide is to be your cosmic bellhop. There’s a hilarious and insightful video I’ve embedded here that speaks to the idea that emotional baggage can’t be left behind in life. It has an uncanny ability to track you down... <<http://vimeo.com/18994377>>.

PURPOSE OF THIS READER GUIDE. You have the book, so what the heck can this brief guide do for you? I will focus on just four of the equations that I introduce in the book and give you a more personal and in-depth approach to how you can use these in your life. In writing the

book, my intention was – and continues to be – to help you understand practical tools that can help you unpack your most challenging emotions or the positive ones that most elude you. For the sake of the book, I had to cover a wide variety of topics and had to sanitize the overall text, but, for this study guide, I'll give you my unvarnished perspective of each of the four tools that are practical wisdom that can assist you in unpacking the following emotions: Anxiety, Happiness, Despair/Meaning, and Curiosity.

ANXIETY = UNCERTAINTY x POWERLESSNESS

I've been told that nearly one-fifth of Americans are on some kind of doctor-prescribed, mood-altering medication with the majority of them ingesting something to help relieve their sense of anxiety or depression. All hail, the great Pharma industry! Over the course of my life, there've been a couple of times that I've been prescribed an anti-anxiety/depressant medication. For me, I've never found this medication to be the panacea and, maybe due to two family members' addiction to Xanax, I have long searched for non-medical solutions to this most vexing of modern emotions.

When I was doing my research for this equation, I was amazed by how much psychological research has been done on anxiety. But, after reading more than a dozen books and fifty research studies, I was struck by the fact that 95% of the causes of anxiety seemed to be distilled down to what we don't know and what we can't control. I mention in the book under the subheading "Shock Me Now" that most people would prefer receiving an electric shock now that's twice as painful as receiving some random shock in the next 24 hours. This is why, as leaders, we need to recognize that hiding the truth, especially when it's going to come out at some point in the near future, is a futile mistake that can often just increase the amount of anxiety your employees are feeling.

In the book, the first suggestion under "Working Through The Equation" outlines the Anxiety Balance Sheet but it does so quite briefly. Frankly, of all the various emotional tools in the book, I've found this to be one of the most powerful and appreciated by those who've used it. Maybe that's because people already have some familiarity with the logic of assets and liabilities on a balance sheet. Take out a piece of paper and create four columns. Then, think of something that is currently making you anxious. Regarding that subject, the first column is "What Do I Know" about this issue. The second column is "What Don't I Know." The third column is "What Can I Influence." The fourth column is "What Can't I Influence." Spend enough time doing this so that you have at least one item per column but you may find that you have a half-dozen items

in some columns. After you feel complete, what do you notice with respect to the four columns? About 80% of the people I've worked this through with are surprised that they have more items listed in columns one and three (the "good" columns) than they do in columns two and four. The reality is that when something is making us anxious, we tend to fixate on those elements of the problem that feel mysterious (what we don't know) or uncontrollable (what we can't influence). So, there's some liberation in just outlining what's making you crazy and realizing that there may be many balancing positives to those issues that are vexing you.

Now, spend some time reviewing the items in column two (what you don't know). Is there someone you can ask – your boss, your boyfriend, your doctor – who can help you with some needed information that will move this item from column two to column one (or maybe it's just doing a Google search)? I know it's scary to ask your boss whether your job is in jeopardy, but remember the electric shock example from three paragraphs ago. Anxiety can be more painful and debilitating than bad news. Now look at column four and truly ask yourself, "Are you completely powerless about the items on this list?" I've found that having a smart friend sit with me can sometimes help me uncover ways to move items from column four to column three. In sum, just the act of unpacking your anxiety bag and knowing what's inside can have a profound effect on reducing your fear of the future.

HAPPINESS = WANTING WHAT YOU HAVE / HAVING WHAT YOU WANT

People often have a love-hate relationship with this equation. The proper definitions of the numerator and denominator are what create the magic. "Wanting what you have" can be translated into "practicing gratitude," having a reverence for what is working in your life. The more tricky definition is in the bottom of this equation. To "have what you want" is an act of "pursuing gratification." I want something and it's my job to go out and pursue it or "have" it in order to satisfy that want.

Don't get me wrong. The act of pursuing something can bring us a sense of accomplishment and take us into that focused "flow" state that I positively talk about in chapter ten. But, the risk is that "chasing something with hostility" (some dictionaries' definition of "pursuit") or even with just focused attention can completely distract you from what's in the numerator, what you already have. As a type-A guy who's spent more than my share of time on the hedonic treadmill, I can tell you that it's very difficult to simultaneously practice gratitude while also pursuing gratification. Some mystics are able to take the bottom of this equation down to zero which may give them infinite happiness. But, for the rest of us mere mortals, the risk is not in spending time

in the denominator as this is part of what modern society demands of us. The risk is that we completely diminish the power of the numerator.

So, the true magic of this equation is in finding ways of keeping your attention on the numerator. Someone said that feeling gratitude without actually sharing it with someone is like wrapping a present without giving it to the intended recipient. So, what are the ways you can show your gratitude in such a fashion that it becomes a habit or practice for you that's ingrained in your everyday life? For me, I needed to start by having it on my conscious "to-do" list each day. I had a rule that I had to give two face-to-face expressions of gratitude each day at work, preferably to someone who found the thank you unexpected. In fact, I wrote about this in the Huffington Post after one of my recent trips to Bali <http://huff.to/wlgKoY>. What if you thought of your expressions of gratitude like a devotional daily offering?

Let me give you a suggestion about a Gratitude Journal as well. They're not for everyone just like personal journals resonate with some while others are allergic to them. The purpose of a Gratitude Journal is to help you be conscious about "wanting what you have." But, if the process of writing in one takes you away from this noble purpose then it isn't a useful tool. An alternative means of accomplishing this purpose is to have a Gratitude Buddy. Make it a point to meet with your Buddy once a month (or more frequently if you wish) in a location where there are no distractions and ask each other, "What gifts do you have in your life that are easy to take for granted?" and "What was a recent gift that may have been wrapped up as a pain or punishment?"

For those of you who'd like to explore this equation a little further, I have two suggestions. Go to the Notes section (please do spend some time there as it's a treasure trove of additional info that can help you explore certain emotions more deeply) and see at the end of the next to last paragraph under Happiness the discussion of Jeff T. Larsen and Amie R. McKibban's research article where they literally put this equation to the test (with inconclusive results, but really interesting findings). <http://webpages.acs.ttu.edu/jelarsen/PDFs/Larsen&McKibban2008.pdf>

Or, you might watch my 2010 TED talk <http://bit.ly/A2m7Px> where I share my key learning from my trip to Bhutan to study their Gross National Happiness Index.

DESPAIR = SUFFERING – MEANING

I am very proud of this equation. It's the one that got me started on creating *Emotional Equations* and it's one that's maybe the most versatile, as just about anyone can find benefit from it. And, for those who have called the book "profound," I've found that the equation that they were most drawn to was this one. At the same time, the words "despair" and "meaning" can be off-putting for some. Consider "sadness" as a tamer version of despair or "learning" as a more concrete version of meaning.

First off, in order for the math to work, "suffering" has to be a constant. This can also be a struggle for some. As one person said to me recently, "I get that there's always suffering around, but you don't have to focus on it. There's probably happiness ever-present as well." That is true, especially if you don't spend too much time in the bottom half of that Happiness equation. But, there are so many gifts that come to us when we accept that suffering is a constant in life. It can help you with the Disappointment equation (as long as you don't shift into a place of always expecting suffering). It can help you feel less entitled and more appreciative.

I had no idea when I started writing this book that this decade would come to resemble the 1930s in that our near Depression-like economic conditions would persist as long as they have. In the Notes section of chapter one, I mention the Glenn H. Elder, Jr. and Jeffrey K. Liker study, "Hard Times in Women's Lives: Historical Influences Across Forty Years." This is a fascinating piece of research which showed that while the Depression was a very difficult time for so many people, it was an educational precursor for young women unknowingly in preparation for what it would be like to lose their husbands later in life. As these women learned resilience, self-reliance, independence, and courage this early in life, it came to serve them in very valuable ways later in life when their husbands passed away before they did.

So, consider "meaning" in the following way: many of us go to the gym to exercise our physical muscles to assure that our physical body doesn't bloat or atrophy. If you're going through a difficult time right now, maybe – unwittingly – you've signed up for emotional boot camp and you're being asked to exercise emotional muscles that haven't had this kind of workout for years. But, this isn't meant to be just agony. It's meant to prepare you for later in life. The emotions you may be mastering today will serve you well at some later point in your life, maybe in the not too distant future.

For me, having my long-term relationship end in the midst of my train wreck of a life in 2009 was the last thing I was looking for. Suffering felt ever-present like the fog during a San Francisco summer. The foghorn that cut through this opaque time was the question I asked myself on my most sad, self-pitying days, “How is this experience going to serve me in my next relationship? How is this going to make me a better partner when I find my true soul mate?” These weren’t easy questions to ask when I felt radioactive and completely incapable of imagining anyone would love me again. But, the exercise metaphor and the fact that I could joke with friends about my emotional boot camp helped me realize that there could be great rewards – or meaning – that could arise as a result of this painful experience. So, just know that there are fruits to gather in the valley of Despair.

CURIOSITY = WONDER + AWE

We’ve had a multiplication, a division, and a subtraction equation so far. Now, we’ll finish with an addition equation around the experience of curiosity. In the book, I mentioned another equation that’s served me well when I’ve been looking for serenity in my life: Peace = Curiosity + Faith. When I’m most troubled by something, I tend to use my curious mind and my faithful heart as a means of defusing my reactive nature to assuming I’m cursed by some news or outcome that wasn’t to my liking. The curiosity takes me to a place in which I can imagine there may be other benefits or possible solutions, while the faith gives me a sense that I’m not being punished.

Some recent studies have shown that curiosity is one of the most valuable emotional qualities people can have during the most difficult of times. Fear and most negative emotions train us to narrow our scope. “Fight or flight” reactions have been evolution’s means of helping us to avert danger. But, today, quite often our best remedy to dealing with life’s challenges is to move from the narrowing of our attention to the “broaden and build” way to thinking that Barbara Fredrickson talks about in the chapter on Positivity. So, getting through this recession may require bigger thinking rather than narrow execution.

When you’re living in a place of fear, it is hard to be curious. But, I’ve found that so much of it comes back to defusing my natural tendency toward reactivity. In other words, it’s learning to pause. Curiosity is not a reactive emotion. It’s one that takes a certain amount of reflection time and a willingness to admit what you don’t know. So, ask yourself, “What habitats allow me to be more curious?” I first had to make a list of which habitats made me less curious: the office, any conference room, investor meetings, and spending time with people who I wanted to impress.

So, I knew that these were not places that were going to help me stoke up my bigger thinking. Ironically, when I made my list of curious habitats I found my list to be longer than I expected: anywhere in nature but especially near a beach with crashing surf; hanging out with kids; museums or other experimental spaces with art; zoos; places with a big night sky and lots of stars; my backyard cottage; and any place where I felt comfortable laughing from my gut (as it's hard to be full of humor and full of fear at the same time).

As I've gotten older, I've found that seeking the sacred in life opens up my sense of awe and my ability to connect with my curiosity muscles. I've recently made a decision to seek out a sacred festival somewhere in the world each quarter as a means of committing to finding habitats for curiosity. As I've mentioned in the book, I've been an aficionado of Burning Man (and recently joined their non-profit board) for many years and some of my best business ideas have come out of my time in the desert marveling at transcendent art and having non-linear conversations.

So, if you're feeling "on empty" creatively, know that curiosity is the fuel you need to be seeking. In author Liz Gilbert's 2009 TED talk <http://bit.ly/wdiqYi> she shares the fact that the genesis of the word "genius" comes from "genie" and that the most creative people in the world are able to become vessels for the genie to inhabit them. My experience is that these genies prefer inhabiting curious places in the world and that's where they're most likely to tap you on your shoulder and give you the gift of inspiration that may change your life.