
Algebra I: Emotional Equations

Name:**Date:****Chip Conley: Chief Emotional Officer?**

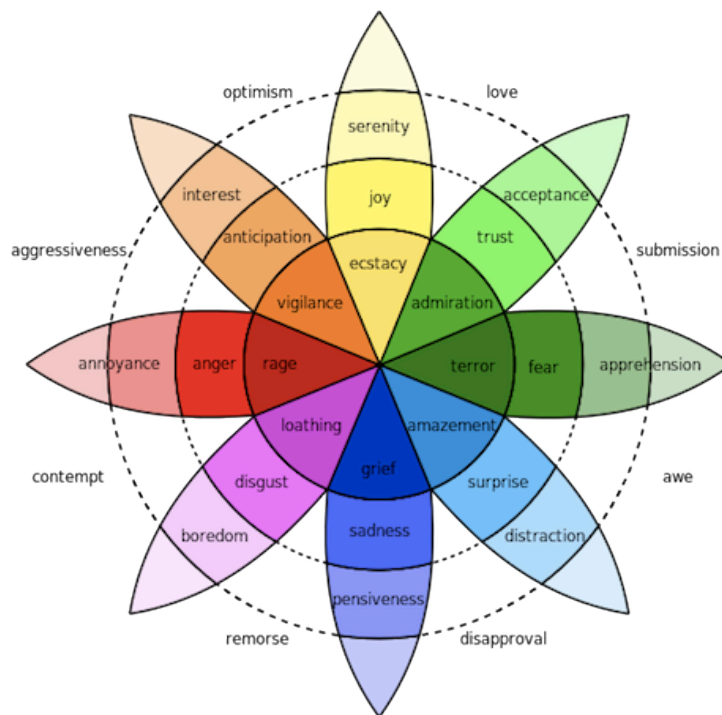
Leaders are the “emotional thermostats” of the groups they lead. If you want to dig into the support for this, read this compelling piece by Daniel Goleman, the man who popularized the idea of “emotional intelligence” in the 90s and proved that 2/3 of the effectiveness of business leaders comes from their EQ rather than their IQ or level of work experience.

There are multiple metaphors I use to describe how emotions work in our lives. 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. If you are a Chief Emotions Officer, you are more aware of all the bags you’re carrying and how to open your luggage up and make sense of what’s inside.

4 Emotions to Unpack

We're going to focus on four emotions that you can start unpacking (i.e. mastering).

Think of emotions as existing on a color wheel. Isaac Newton created the color wheel long ago and helped us understand that red plus blue equals purple, for instance. I learned in my research for Emotional Equations – which allowed me to spend a couple of years with some of the world's psychology luminaries – that there's an emotional wheel with primary and secondary emotions: the Plutchik wheel. In my book, I evolve this wheel further so you can imagine that



Disappointment + a Sense of Responsibility = Regret.

And, once you understand the emotional building blocks of Regret, you can turn it from a downer into a lesson. Regret teaches. Fear protects. Sadness releases. Joy uplifts. Empathy unites. Think of your emotions as messages that give you the freedom, rather than the obligation, to respond. One of my favorite quotes of all time comes from Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Now, let's unpack and master the emotions of Despair, Happiness, Anxiety, and Curiosity.

DESPAIR = SUFFERING – MEANING

I am very proud of this equation.

It's the one that started my exploration of emotions through the lens of equations. I took Viktor Frankl's book and distilled it down to this useful mantra at a time in my life in 2008, when I had a series of friends commit suicide, had a flatline experience myself while giving a speech in St. Louis (literally: my heart stopped, and I dropped), and the rest of my life felt in disarray.

First off, in order for the math to work, "suffering" has to be a constant. This is the first Noble Truth of Buddhism. The Depression was a very difficult time for so many people, interview-based research studies show that it indirectly prepared young women for losing their husbands later in life. These women learned self-reliance, independence, and courage early in life, which served them (and perhaps saved their families) when their husbands passed.

So, consider "meaning" in the following way: many of us go to the gym to exercise our physical muscles to ensure 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 – humility, resilience, persistence, a sense of humor – 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 couldn't imagine anyone loving me again.

1. **How can you add meaning to whatever you are experiencing? How will it make you a better _____? (The questions might be more important than the answer...)**

$$\text{HAPPINESS} = \frac{\text{WANTING WHAT YOU HAVE}}{\text{HAVING WHAT YOU WANT}}$$

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 difficult 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. 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. Socrates said it best, “He who is not contented with what he has would not be contented with what he would like to 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 lack of pursuit, as this is part of what modern society demands of us. The risk is that we completely diminish the power of gratitude.

So, the true power of this equation is in keeping your attention on the numerator.

Someone once said to me that feeling gratitude without 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?

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?”

2. List 10 things for which you are grateful:

ANXIETY = UNCERTAINTY x POWERLESSNESS

After reading more than a dozen books and 50 research studies on anxiety, 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. You may have heard of the study that demonstrated 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.

If we know that the combustible product of uncertainty and powerlessness creates anxiety, we can create what I call an Anxiety Balance Sheet to turn this around. 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.

| What Do I Know? | What Don't I Know? | What Can I Influence? | What Can't I Influence? |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | |

CURIOSITY = WONDER + AWE

We've had a subtraction, a division, and a multiplication equation so far. Now, we'll finish with an addition equation around the experience of curiosity. Recent studies have shown that curiosity is one of the most valuable emotional qualities people can leverage during periods of crisis. Fear and most negative emotions train us to narrow our scope. "Fight or flight" reactions are evolution's means of helping us avert danger. But, oftentimes, we need to move from narrowing our attention to the "broaden and build" way of thinking.

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 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.

3. What habitats make you LESS curious?

So, I knew that these were not places that were going to help me stoke up 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 (it's hard to be full of humor and full of fear at the same time).

4. What habitats "stoke up bigger thinking?"

So, if you're feeling "on empty" creatively, know that curiosity is the fuel you need to seek. In author Liz Gilbert's 2009 TED talk (TED is another habitat for curiosity), 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.

In sum, the more the external world becomes chaotic, the more we rely upon internal logic. This was true in the 1930s when Nazism and political and religious fundamentalism rose. But, that decade also sprouted new thinking from people like Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie, Napoleon Hill, Viktor Frankl, and Reinhold Niebuhr (who created the Serenity Prayer).

I hope that you find these emotional equations help you to think differently, live better, and truly become the Chief Emotions Officer of your own life. It's worth the introspection.

(Adapted from Tim Ferriss's Blog)