

# **Enlighten Up Your Day**

## **Chapter One**

### **The Engine of Emotion**

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## Understanding the Engine of Emotion

*“Every why hath a wherefore” – William Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>*

One way to think about emotions is to use the internal combustion engine as a model. Our emotional engine, like a car engine, is hidden from sight. To understand our emotional engine we must be willing to pop the hood and look inside. Looking inside means gaining insight into our unconscious patterns of beliefs and expectations – the why and wherefore – that drive our feelings. The following is a list of some of the major components of our emotional engine:

**The Three-Part Ego** - There are three ego-states that a person will operate from depending on their circumstances. These are the Parent Ego state, the Adult Ego state, and the Child Ego state. Each of these ego-states serve an important function in the overall maintenance of our feelings and our ability to relate effectively with other people.

**The Five Cardinal Values** - Cardinal values form a large part of our basic personality. Identifying our Cardinal Values helps us to understand why we feel strongly about some things and not others. For instance, if one of our Cardinal Values is fairness then we might react strongly to situations that we perceive as being unfair. We may even try to force our sense of fairness on to others. But by understanding and taking ownership for our value of fairness we will be less inclined to overreact.

**Thought Distortions** - Human society runs on the power of belief. Thought distortions are inaccurate beliefs that, when triggered, cause a corresponding emotional reaction. Learning to recognize and counter thought distortions helps us to increase our ability to manage our feelings.

**Schemas** - A schema is a model of something that allows us to orient ourselves quickly to our circumstances. We begin developing schemas from the moment we are born. Our very first schema is based on our primary caregiver, usually our mother. As we mature in understanding we expand our schemas to include the world around us. Schemas provide internal models that help us to make predictions about the world. However, if our models are poorly constructed they can become a source of anxiety, depression, and relationship conflict.

**Defense Mechanisms** - A defense mechanism is an unconscious attempt by the ego to manage feelings of anxiety. Children are equipped with natural strategies to feel emotionally connected to their parents. If these strategies fail the ego will often turn them into defense mechanisms. These mechanisms become part of the Child Ego state. That we have defense mechanisms is natural; however, when a defense mechanism no longer serves a useful purpose it is time to discard or modify it.

During your journey with Enlighten Up Your Day you will become more familiar with your emotional engine. In doing so you will gain greater freedom, wellbeing, and mental health. This process will require patience, commitment, and the courage to challenge self-limiting beliefs. You will learn mindfulness techniques and coping skills to increase your ability to transform emotional pain into wisdom and compassion. You are in charge of your own process of growth and change. You set the pace. There is no rush, judgment, or failure.

## The Four Factors of Mood

*Mental Health is not about feeling good all the time. It's about being good at feeling.*

Our overall mood is dependent on four interacting factors. The four factors are: our physical state, our thoughts, our environment, and our behaviors or actions. When you're feeling upset use the list below to help lift your mood. By taking positive actions in any of these areas we influence our mood for the better.

### Physical:

- Walking, biking, treadmill, jogging
- Medication for depression or anxiety
- Cardio exercise
- Diet
- Good sleep practices
- Yoga, Tai Chi, Aikido
- Attending to physical illness or injury

### Thinking:

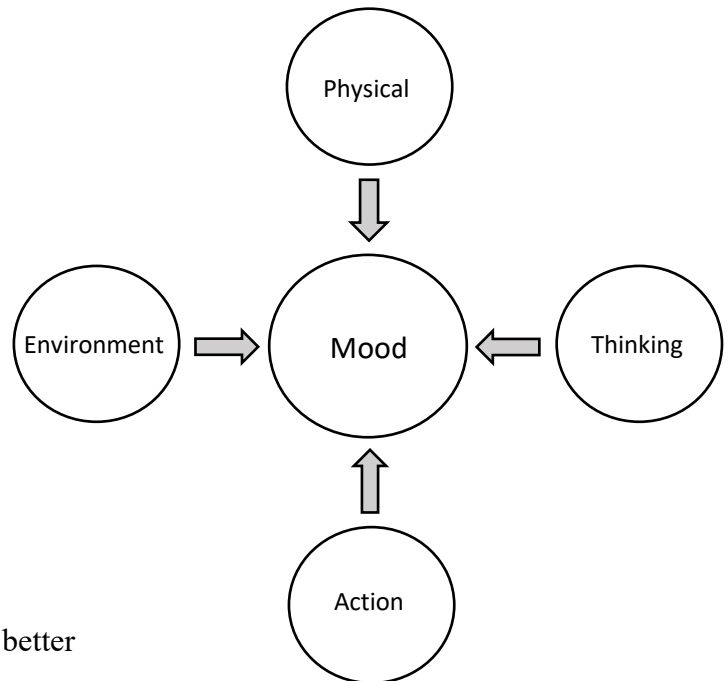
- Reframing, i.e., think differently about things
- Check the facts
- Challenge irrational beliefs
- Modify schemas, i.e., worldview
- Mindfulness meditation

### Environment:

- Change something in your environment for the better
- Remove yourself from a triggering situation

### Behavior:

- Take small steps over time
- Cultivate a healthy routine
- Opposite action to counter low motivation (just do it)
- Conscious relaxation such as slow breaths
- Listen to music or do something fun to distract yourself
- Visit with a friend or family member
- Volunteer or attend a support group



Develop a routine that combines coping strategies from each of the Four Factors of Mood. You can alter them as needed depending on the circumstances. It takes time and practice to acquire new skills so don't get discouraged. Just keep at it.

## Climbing the Emotional Ladder

*“The fastest, most reliable way to change how you feel is by changing what you do” - Nore Shpancer, Ph.D<sup>ii</sup>*

Acquiring new skills is a three stage process. In the first stage we have to learn the material by utilizing some form of curriculum such as taking classes, reading books, watching videos online, etc. Having studied the material it's time to practice what we've learned. Anyone who drives a car remembers the experience of learning to drive. The learning stage was anxiety provoking, exciting, frustrating, but ultimately rewarding. Having practiced driving in controlled settings such as country roads and parking lots, the skills needed to drive become increasingly embodied. Finally, we were able to generalize our driving skills across a variety of settings. This same sequence of learning, practicing, and generalizing applies to the mastering of any skill set.

It's reasonable to scale a ladder one rung at a time rather than trying to jump from the bottom to the top in a single bound. First, write a thriving statement which represents an emotional goal. An example is: "Thriving feels like being calm, confident, kind, and energetic." Then, using the Four Factors of Mood on page 4 as a guide, make a list of coping skills. Choose the easiest skill for the first step and then add the more challenging skills until you reach Step Five.

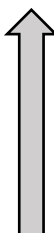
Write your thriving statement here: \_\_\_\_\_

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List your skills starting at the base of the ladder and progress to the more challenging at the top.



5. (More challenging) \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

1. (My easiest) \_\_\_\_\_

## The Five Choices

We have five possible choices when presented with a given situation. We can remove ourselves from the situation. We can alter the situation by finding a solution. We can look for ways to feel better about the situation. We can radically accept the situation without fighting it. Or we can allow ourselves to feel upset about the situation. Any of these options are acceptable as long as we understand that we are in charge of our choices. You may be pleasantly surprised to realize that you are doing many of these things already.

### Examples of removing yourself from your current circumstance

- Take a mindfulness walk around the block when feeling upset.
- Table a heated discussion and agree to return to it when both parties have cooled down.
- Relocate to a new location, town, or city.
- Find a new job that is better suited for your personality and temperament.
- End a relationship that has become toxic.

### Examples of altering your current circumstance

- Clean and organize a small area of your home, room, or yard.
- Change how you communicate to the people in your life.

### Examples of feeling better about your current circumstance

- Reflect on things you are grateful for.
- Practice meditation to increase non-attachment, insight, and acceptance.
- Take positive action leading to feeling better, then take more positive actions.
- Self-care through the five senses: nature walk, aromatherapy, warm bath, etc.
- Pray or just talk – and listen – to your higher power, God, or Spirit.

### Examples of radical acceptance

- Make a list of the things you cannot change verses the things that you can. Change the things you can.
- Use mindfulness meditation to expand your ability to accept your feelings as they are.
- Observe and describe your feelings to yourself, then reengage the moment.
- Focus on your breath and relax into the situation just as it is.
- Practice letting go of trying to force outcomes to be your way (non-attachment).
- Practice modifying your “should statements” into “I statements.”

### Examples of allowing yourself to feel your upset feelings

- Be okay with feeling upset for a while.
- Release your feelings by expressing them using your voice in a private and safe environment.
- Throw a foam ball at the wall.
- Have a one-minute temper tantrum in a private and safe environment.

# The Five Choices Exercise

Frustration and anxiety are linked to feelings of being powerless in a given situation. It's only when we believe that we are powerless to effect change that we run into emotional trouble. This exercise helps you to remember that you do have choices even when you feel powerless.

Example . . .

Situation:	I was in a slow moving line at the bank and everyone seemed to have complex banking issues.
Choices:	I distracted myself by listening to a podcast on my phone. I felt better.
	I used mindfulness to increase my acceptance of the situation.
	I didn't judge my feelings.
	I modified my should statements and took ownership for my moral perspective.
	I used the time to connect with God by praying.

Situation:	
Choices:	

Situation:	
Choices:	

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

*"If you have a bull that is difficult to control, give him a larger pasture in which to graze" – Zen proverb*

Mindfulness makes us aware that our thoughts, feelings, and sensations are continually coming and going like water. We may also begin to notice that they form patterns of thinking and feeling. Our patterns of thinking and feeling make mental formations. These mental formations are made of images, feelings, and beliefs that generate our internal reality. "Mental formations are the objects of the mind" (Thich Nhat Hanh).<sup>iii</sup>

By practicing mindfulness meditation we begin to increase the space between ourselves and our more challenging mental formations. Not all mental formations are harmful. Formations that produce feelings of kindness and compassion are to be encouraged. Likewise, those formations that increase our ability to make wise and reasoned decisions are also beneficial. We need only address those mental formations that can potentially cause harm.

Mindfulness teaches us to see and release our harmful formations. We notice our formations and accept them without judgment, clinging, or pushing them away. In doing so we increase our capacity for emotional calm and resiliency.

### Mindfulness Practice

1. Sit comfortably and upright in a relaxed environment.
2. Strive to make your breath soft and quiet. Avoid chasing your breath up and down your spine as doing so agitates the mind. It's preferable to breathe in and out through the nose; but the main consideration is to find a way that works for you.
3. Observe and give space to all of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations like watching flowing water from the bank of a river. Try not to create some special state of mind or criticize your efforts. The goal is to increase your ability to accept your mental activity without judgment.
4. Setting a timer is helpful. It takes at least three minutes for the nervous system to start to settle down. When you feel more comfortable with meditation you can increase your practice time as you see fit.



## Summary

*“Feelings are not ready made. They are the result of our own actions”*

— Tenzin Gyatso, The 14<sup>th</sup> Dali Lama <sup>iv</sup>

One way to think about emotions is to use the internal combustion engine as a model. Our emotional engine, like a car engine, is hidden from sight. To understand our emotional engine we must be willing to pop the hood and look inside. Looking inside means gaining insight into our unconscious patterns of beliefs and expectations – the why and wherefore – that drive our feelings.

### Points to consider:

- There are various aspects of the mind that we can compare to the parts of an engine: The Three-Part Ego, The Five Cardinal Values, Thought Distortions, Schemas, and Defense Mechanisms.
- Understanding each part of the emotional engine is a process. This process requires patience, commitment, and the courage to challenge self-limiting beliefs.
- Just like learning to drive a car, acquiring a new set of skills is a three stage process of learning, practicing, and generalizing. First, we learn how the car operates, then we practice in low stress situations like country roads and empty parking lots, and lastly we generalize our understanding by driving on the freeway and city streets.
- Mental health is not about feeling good all the time; it’s about being good at feeling. You set the pace. There is no rush, judgment, or failure.
- Mental and physical health is our natural tendency and birthright.
- Everyone has an inner core that is already happy and at peace. This is what is meant by the term, Buddha nature. This core nature is like the sky above the clouds – vast and luminous. It is waiting to be discovered through the practice of mindfulness, intentionality, and introspection.

## References:

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- <sup>ii</sup> Shpancerm, N. (2021) Laws of Emotional Mastery. (p. 59). Psychology Today. New York, NY. Sussex Publishers LLC
- <sup>iii</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) Taking Care of Our Mental Formations and Perceptions. PlumVillage, France.
- <sup>iv</sup> Tenzin Gyatso, Cutler, H.C. (1998) The Art of Happiness: A handbook for living. Norwalk, CT. Easton Press