



BUILD AN EMOTIONAL FOXHOLE FOR TOUGH TIMES

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Everyone has what I jokingly refer to as character-building days. No matter who you are, you have days you feel overwhelmed by work, the weather, your family, a certain situation, another person, or just life. These days are a fact of living in the real world. No matter how hard you try to be perfect or have a perfect life, there will always be people and events out of your control. Most of the time you can pull yourself up by the bootstraps and deal with the daily challenges that life has to offer you.

However, the last three years have been a huge emotional rollercoaster with shutdowns, restrictions, insane rules, and a division of people like I have never seen in my lifetime with challenging and differing views of life for Business Owners and Entrepreneurs.

We do not live on normal time, we live on money time in order to create services and products to assist others. All this stress caused by flip flopping so-called Public Servants who seem to be doing non-beneficial things to the people who voted for them. The educational system is failing us, the medical field has been comprised by corporate owners. Then add in inflation, the rising costs of goods, difficulties getting staff to work for you, more taxes, more rules, and more impossible challenges daily for a business owner. The end result is many of us, including myself, experiencing serious burn out of work, worry and stress.



As a business coach and running Success Smarts Club for business owners I've heard almost daily in whispers, "if I could just sell my business and be free from all this unrelenting stress but the market won't even support that dream."



In private conversations, many entrepreneurs have shared how reality seems to be getting more dangerous and unsettling. It has affected the bottom lines of many businesses where clients, customers and patients are afraid to spend money.

We must prioritize and remember that we are the providers of not only services and products, we are also the providers of jobs, and clients of vendors. We must make sure we take care of ourselves, or we will not have the ability to take care of the people we think of as our TEAM.

If there was ever a time you must nurture yourself and honor your emotions it would be now. Create an emotional foxhole for yourself and retreat from the world for a short time to regroup. Society teaches us that when things go wrong, we must keep a stiff upper lip, be strong, adopt a don't-let-them-see-you-sweat attitude. Truthfully, this advice can create some long-term emotional problems. We're not taught to honor our own emotional needs. If you go through life blocking or denying the negative feelings you experience, you become numb. When you emotionally shut down or numb out the negative, you also block out the good in your life. Before you know it, you're living in a trance; you walk around unconscious of how you feel.

It's important to grasp the concept that feelings are energy, and they need to be acknowledged. The more you deny your feelings the more they will push for recognition. When you decide to take back your life and control your destiny, you must give yourself permission to also accept yourself fully. There is value in understanding that there is an important difference between owning your negative feelings and focusing on them.



When you give yourself permission to own your feelings, you are accepting yourself for what you really feel. It's acceptable to allow yourself to feel helpless, unloved, depressed, lonely, taken advantage of, weak, insecure, afraid, unsure, confused, or lost. Everyone has these feelings from time to time.

By giving yourself permission to acknowledge your feelings, you release some of the internal pressure to be perfect and to be all things to all people. When we deny our emotions and stuff them down inside of us for a long period of time, they build up and start to create bigger problems: mental or physical imbalances such as depression, illness, and anger. By admitting that you have these negative feelings, you allow yourself to

release the tension. The problem may still need to be addressed, but much of the pressure and tension has evaporated. You'll be able to arrive at solutions more easily because you're no longer using your energy to deal with your emotions.

I made it a point to interview successful people on what strategies or resources they use when they have a really bad day. One company vice president told me that he knows he is having an emotionally off day when he feels overwhelmed and beaten up by his job and problems. To correct this, he first admits to himself that he needs to get away from it all to regroup. His stress management strategies depend on the time of the year: if it's summer, he goes fishing; if it's winter, he goes home and works in his workshop. The point is that he creates some space for himself to be able to get away from all the phones, clients, and stressful problems.



By getting away, he can let go and relax. He allows himself to be unproductive and to heal from the hectic activities and pressures. Getting away allows him to listen to himself, to feel bad if he needs to, and to deal with his problems. He stated that he felt men have so much pressure from society to be strong and handle everything perfectly. Allowing downtime for himself allows him to be upset in private. He states that he gives himself a limit of just one day and the next day it's back to the job. Ninety-nine percent of the time, this strategy works for him and keeps him sane. He is currently working on a proposal to his company to make it policy that employees have mental health (or hooky) days to blow off steam and frustrations.



After listening to this executive's story, I had a chance to try out his advice. I experienced firsthand how I had to do more to nurture myself than tell myself to be positive and things would get better in the future. I had just experienced a huge failure in one of my business projects. I was so disappointed with myself for how I had misjudged the situation. I had worked on perfecting this project for over a year, yet it never got off the ground. I had invested a great deal of my savings and I fell flat on my face for all the world to see.

I took this failure very personally. My mind was racing on what effect this loss would have on my career and life. I kept thinking, if I had just been better, if I had done things differently, if the economy had been better, or we had a better time frame. I spent days going over and over in my mind what I could have done to save this venture. I felt like a complete failure; I couldn't let it go. I beat myself up worse than anyone else could have ever beaten me up. Plain positive thinking was not helping me pull out of this emotional

mess I was caught up in - I felt utter hopelessness. This feeling lasted several weeks, and my life was pure hell.

Finally, I'd had enough. I left my office, went home, shut off the phones, and didn't answer the door. I let the rest of the world take care of itself for a few hours while I just wallowed in my own feelings.

While I was throwing myself this “drop out of reality” party, I had a bigger picture in mind. I didn't want to get caught up in feeling sorry for myself to the point that I gave up on myself, so I designed a safety net. At 6 p.m., no matter how I felt, I was to get dressed and get out of the house. I gave myself some options for breaking this mood: go shopping, eat out with friends, or go to the movies. I built a time limit into my emotional foxhole. I allowed myself to own and experience my feelings, but I put a time limit on how long I would focus on them. And it worked - the next day I felt so much better! The fact that I failed at something was still a reality, but emotionally I was over it. I had allowed myself to grieve the loss, and now I could move on.



I've been speaking to audiences since the beginning of my career about strategies for using human potential. I used to teach that when you were having a bad day or buckling under a negative problem, use positive affirmations, listen to motivational podcasts, and do a pattern interrupt to break the negative flow. These strategies clearly still work because if you are merely temporarily off balance, repeating affirmations and listening to recordings will change your focus. Whatever you focus on always expands. Changing your focus from what is wrong in your life to that which is good will leave you in a more positive, resourceful state of mind. Occasionally though, positivity just won't be enough.

I am now taking the concept of nurturing and loving yourself during difficult times to a deeper level. There are times when you must give yourself permission to create an emotional foxhole. There is no question that we all have physical sick days, and we also have emotional sick days. Think of those days when we are filled with fears and lack faith in ourselves or the future because we are overwhelmed with life and dealing with our responsibilities. What I have come to discover over the past few years, from my own personal experience and the experience of others, is that if you don't confront and deal with your emotions you may deny yourself one of the most important aspects of being alive - *your true feelings*.



In doing this you suppress your frustrations to the point that you "go off the deep end" over something insignificant and vent your wrath on innocent bystanders. You need to find an outlet that allows you to get out of your negative state of mind and still honor your feelings. Some good outlets are spiritual reading, artwork, craft projects, massages, fishing, walking, meditation, gardening or almost any hobby. For some people it is organizing and cleaning. To use your energy resources to your greatest advantage, take the time to deal with your feelings right away. Most often you won't have the time or the environment to be able to have a day at home. I don't either, so I've developed some other ways to get over personal setbacks or hurts.

One strategy that I find really works for me is writing out how I feel about what's happening now on why I feel upset. To try this technique, just start writing away in your journal about how you feel. Express your true thoughts about how hurt, frustrated, scared, angry, or overwhelmed you are. If someone else has taken advantage of you, betrayed you, let you down, made you angry, write them a letter telling them how you feel about what they did, exactly what you think of them, and what you would like them to do to stop hurting you. *Of course - never, never send the letters!* The purpose of this exercise is to honor how you are feeling and vent the pent-up feelings out of your body and mind. You no longer must go through the day having imaginary conversations with others about what you would like to say to them. Do it on paper. The magic of this exercise is that you will feel relieved to have gotten it out of your system. Burn the letter and the negative feelings with it or tear it up—any physical way to destroy the negative feelings can be good for your soul.

After you've allowed yourself to own your negative feelings and to grieve your losses, it's time to move on with more empowering strategies that will allow you to regain your control. When we get depressed or have anxiety attacks, it's because we feel we've lost control. We have given up responsibility for what information we are putting into our computer, our brain.



Your thinking process creates your emotions; your emotions control your behavior. When you accept responsibility for your own thoughts, you can control your feelings. It's good to give yourself time to experience your emotions and own them. After a short time, however, you need to do a pattern interrupt on yourself, because what you focus on expands. Change your focus. Go do something that is fun or rewarding to you. Separate yourself from the situation. Making a big mistake doesn't make you a failure.

When you make a mistake or have a failure, treat it as the exception. Say to yourself, *"This isn't like me; next time I will succeed."* I used to love to watch the old Bloopers TV show; it reminds me how to treat my mistakes - cut them out and do retakes! There's no need for guilt or punishment if you learn from experience and try again. Refocus your life energy and attitude on the positive and be supportive of yourself. Treat yourself as you would your best friend. Give yourself permission to experience life and do not hide from it.

FOUR POSITIVE WAYS TO DEAL WITH A BAD DAY

Sometimes life becomes so demanding with pressures from work, family, home, and social life that we need the adult equivalent of Linus's blanket from the Peanuts cartoon. Here are some tips for when you feel overwhelmed:

1. Try to get to a place where you can be alone. Imagine yourself in your favorite place or a quiet, peaceful location such as in a forest, on the top of a mountain or by the waterfront - a mental Shangri-La. Not only is this an excellent pattern interrupt but this type of imagery allows you to focus on something beautiful and emotionally rewarding. The University of Delaware has done studies proving that imagining a quiet natural scene in your mind will significantly reduce your stress.
2. Another way to gain control over your emotions is to simply breathe deeply several times. When your heart is beating too fast because of your anxious feelings, controlled breathing slows your heart and allows you to feel in control again. Breathing is also an effective form of muscle relaxation.
3. Much of the stress we feel is a result of our own thoughts, so if we can think ourselves into a stressful state, we can think ourselves into relaxation. Thoughts that are relaxed make our muscles relax. Controlling your self-talk will instruct your mind to feel better and ease away the pressures of the demanding world. Some Declarations that are helpful are:
 - *I am now calm and cool under all circumstances.*
 - *I am in control of my life. I now can let go and relax.*
 - *I am in control of all my thoughts and actions.*
 - *I am very effective and efficient in stressful situations.*
 - *I love and honor myself.*
 - *I have a positive attitude that I can handle myself in all situations.*
4. Give yourself permission to appreciate yourself by having some positive personal rewards, such as a massage; pampering yourself with a salon treatment, manicure, facial; a good meal (with dessert); a night out on the town; a hot bubble bath and a glass of champagne; phoning someone you love to give you a lift; a cleaning service

to clean your home. High end chocolate! Anything that empowers you to feel like you are special! And the truth is you are special - you are a one-of-a-kind unique human being. Always keep in mind that bad days don't last. This too shall pass. Empower yourself not to let your state of mind control you - you always control your emotions with your thoughts.

EMPOWERING QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN FACED WITH AN EMOTIONALLY ILL DAY

- What can I do today to get away from the world and just take care of myself?
- What can I do to have a good day today despite reality?
- What resources can I use today to get back to my normal positive-thinking self?
- What friends will be a support system, with whom I can share my problems?
- What self-talk can I start to use now to change my state of mind?
- In what areas of my life have I allowed myself to be a victim? What do I want to do differently in the future?
- In what things in my life do I demand that I be perfect?
- In what areas of my life am I out of balance?
- In what activities am I trying to be all things to all people?
- Where in my life am I stuffing my feelings and not venting frustrations?
- How can I not take myself so seriously?
- In one year from today, what will be funny about this situation or my behavior?

I know for a lot of people information like this is so much easier to consume than it is to actually implement it, and the bottom line is it is useless unless you do. If you are one of those individuals who has gotten to the end of his article thinking, "this is wonderful, now where do I start," but you can't seem to find the answers or the motivation to begin than it might be time to reach out for guidance.

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-Darin Web

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Lee Milteer is a Performance and Productivity Coach and the founder of the Smarts® Coaching Program, and **SUCCESS Smarts® CLUB** for Entrepreneurs. Lee is a Best-Selling Author and Award-Winning Professional Speaker and Business Coach. She has counseled and trained more than a million people throughout her career. You can Book Lee to speak at your virtual or live events or leverage her Intuitive Business Skills to achieve your big Life Goals by signing up for private Business coaching. For more information visit our coaching web page at www.milteer.com, or email assistant@milteer.com. As A bonus to the members—We will happily let you test Drive and get a free month of the Brand-New Millionaire Smarts® CLUB by emailing our office at assistant@milteer.com.