



FROM THE SERVICE OFFICER

Earle Taylor

To contact Earle Taylor,
phone: 0422 278 281 or
email: earle@qassp.org.au

BEYOND RESILIENCE: Using 'negative' emotions to advantage

In the previous journal I wrote about how to 'get up, dress up, show up' using resilience strategies to overcome the barriers of negative emotions. This article invites you to take that notion of resilience to a higher level:

- To firstly accept the so-called 'negative' emotions as a natural part of what it is to be human.
- Then to move beyond mere acceptance to embrace the full range of emotions as a source of productive energy.

So what is the one big emotion that we all want to experience and feel? Of all the emotions, which one do we most desire?

If there's any common response to these questions, at least in Western culture, it is 'I just want to be happy.' As a result it is common for people to think, 'If only I could be happy, everything would be okay.' And so lots of people live their lives in the pursuit of happiness.

There's a paradox in pursuing happiness. Pursue happiness directly and happiness will evade you. Stop chasing happiness and focus on doing something that engages you fully, makes a contribution to others, and that you find meaningful, and happiness will be yours.

Beyond that 'happiness paradox', there are several other problems with focusing exclusively on happiness. One problem that arises from over-loading 'happiness' as the most important emotion and the only one worth pursuing is that it tempts us to discount all of the other emotions. We may stop caring about the other emotions and even try to avoid them.

Yet if we are to be emotionally intelligent and whole, we need all of the emotions.

This includes the negative ones as well as the positive ones. We need them all in order to be whole. Without the capacity to experience the full range of human emotions — we cannot be fully alive and able to effectively handle the challenges of life's experiences.

The so-called 'negative' emotions are important for us to know when to 'stop, look, and listen' for what may be going 'wrong' in our world and to make needed changes.

For example when there's a loss of something important in life, it is normal and natural to feel sad. Sadness helps us to recognise the value of the loss. It tenderises our heart. It enables us to recognise what's precious in life. And it motivates us to do the 'grief work' and then replace what we have lost.

Anger is important to recognise a violation of your values. The subsequent energy gives us the backbone to stand up for ourselves and fight for our values. Without that ability we would not stand up for ourselves. Others would learn to walk over us.

Fear is another example of an important emotion as it allows us to recognise a danger or threat to our values and us.

Of course, all emotions can be distorted and erroneous. They need to be checked for accuracy and usefulness.

Over-loading 'happiness' as the most important emotion tends to reduce our ability to tolerate the other emotions. And without emotional tolerance we tend to reject our emotions, avoid them, defend against them, deny them, and use all kinds of defense mechanisms and this, of course, in the long term creates blindness

to our emotions.

Emotional tolerance enables us to work through the experiences of life without getting stuck by hating, resisting, and fighting a symptom — a particular emotion that we dislike. The fact of life is that when we're engaged in any challenging project, there will be setbacks, disappointments, moments of anxiety and stress, and therefore the need for patience and persistence.

All professions can no doubt relate to this and those of us who work in the emotionally charged field of educational leadership can perhaps relate to this more than most. If we, as educational leaders, don't have the emotional tolerance and acceptance of negative emotional states, we can become stopped or blocked by them.

The real solution is simple. Accept an emotion as an emotion, tolerate it as just tension in the body, and explore the meanings creating the emotion in the first place. Then find more effective ways to deal with the emotion. The key to changing any self-destructive behaviour is to be willing to allow or tolerate the feelings that the behaviours are blocking then use the energy to take effective action. Embracing the full emotional range makes us human as educational leaders. Welcome them and use all of them to advantage.

This article draws directly from 'Neurons' a series of weekly articles by Dr L. Michael Hall, Executive Director of the International Society of Neuro-Semantics. To receive a free subscription to 'Neurons' go to www.neurosemantics.com