

# The Emotional Golden Rule

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Mexico update

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### 1. The Science of Positive Emotions

a. Most science is on negative emotions.

Not surprising with prevalent disease model in our society.

b. Why do we have positive emotions? How did they evolve? Many other questions is what she studies.

c. Everybody has emotions-whether they acknowledge them or not.

"And when we don't acknowledge how our emotions are shaping us, whether those are negative or positive emotions, we don't have access to the steering wheel of our life so we end up kind of just pushing our way through as if we are in a bumper car instead of really steering our way through."

Her research on positive emotions has taught her to live with more balance and have more *life* in life.

### 2. Negative Emotions: "Bad is Stronger than Good"

a. This is title of article in Review of General Psychology.

Summarize decades of work to show negative emotions grab our attention much more thoroughly than positive emotions.

Ex: Losing \$100 versus winning \$100

b. This asymmetry is critical to understand.

1) Necessary from our ancestral perspective...many circumstances create negative emotions. We need to have fight or flight response.

2) Positive emotions typically not life threatening rather missed opportunity versus capitalized opportunity.

3) Because we know we are wired this way... strong negative emotions, we know we need to overcome this.

c. Another asymmetry: good and bad events in the world....favors the positive by far! Yet the good do not grab our attention as much as the bad.

### 3. The Golden Rule

- a. Studies show the typical person (no depression or anxiety disorder): 2:1 ratio of good emotions to bad. People who flourish have a 3:1.
    - 1) How did the ratio get determined?
    - 2) Numbers in the U.S.: less than 20% have a 3:1  
Assumption: People are not misrepresenting themselves.
  - b. How do I find out my ratio? [www.positivityratio.com](http://www.positivityratio.com). Test only takes a few minutes.
  - c. How do I understand this for my life? She suggests you take the ratio daily over a few weeks, tracking it as you make changes in your life.
4. Toxic Insincerity
- a. Forcing positive emotions
    - 1) "Fake it 'til you make it"
    - 2) Science shows
      - (a) Insincere smiles can be as damaging to cardiovascular system as expressions of hostility and contempt.
      - (b) Masking a negative feeling with positive veneer both psychologically as well as interpersonally damaging
  - b. Key: Focus on the "make it" versus the "fake it"
  - c. Total elimination of negative feelings would be futile and counterproductive.
    - 1) No emotion should we banish - it's about balance...  
Keeping our negative in proper proportion to our positive.
    - 2) Separate out necessary and "gratuitous negativity"
      - (a) the media..."If it bleeds, it leads."  
Using negativity just to get attention.
      - (b) We do the same: gossip, biting sarcasm.
      - (c) "Necessary" examples:  
death in family....mourn  
injustice in life...angry
  - d. Negativity and positivity can't be given equal weight...why?  
Because of the well documented asymmetry...negative are stronger so need to outweigh with more positive.
5. Resilient people versus non-resilient
- a. Resilient people
    - 1) Emotions very tied to current circumstances

- 2) More emotionally nimble...experience negative emotions when the environment creates those but quickly return to relative positivity as environment changes.
- 3) Tend to have a complex emotional mix of reactions in the midst of difficult circumstances...can feel anxious and worried while at same time feeling grateful and loving. They tend not to leave their good emotions behind when experience tough times.

b. Non-resilient

- 1) More likely to worry about what-ifs and dwell on something that happened in the past that is safely behind us.
- 2) Tend not to experience any positive emotions when feeling negative emotions. When bad things happen-good emotions go out the window.

c) Most of our circumstances are not 100% good/bad

- 1) Bright Sided by Barbara Ehrenreich
- 2) Science shows people who navigate social and emotional situations well are the ones that can embrace contradiction...opposing emotional states.
- 3) Emotions last for moments...we can cultivate certain emotions to help us grow in a certain direction.

6. Emotions versus Self-talk

a. The first and most important leverage point for our emotions is how we interpret our current circumstances.

Self talk often not even an issue.

b. Often the only way we know how we are interpreting a situation is by listening to our self-talk.

- 1) Those interpretations are very powerful...so changing self-talk can have a major impact on our emotions.
- 2) Tons of work in this area of changing depressogenic self-talk towards healthier expectations. It gets down to recognizing when you are being catastrophic in your conclusions and thinking "black and white."  
Examples: self talk: "Why does this always happen to me?"  
"Why do they always do that?"

7. Impact of this on health...under much study. We know the impact of negative emotions, but the balance is what is being studied.

a. Is there a tipping point on the balance scale? This is the issue.