

# Managing Time And Emotion



At the tangible level, I'm most pleased with the linkage of insight to the management of time and the management of emotion. I'll come back to management of time in a minute, what I mean by the management of emotion is that I pretty much just don't get pissed off about anything. I even had a marvelous scenario this morning, something that ordinarily would have sent me to the moon.

My wife couldn't reach me, and, instead of looking for something herself, she called my office to do work for her. Of course, my office doesn't know how to do what my wife wants, so they come to me. Turns out, the information she gave them was wrong, and, as a consequence, so was their response. I ended up doing the work, plus I had to track down all the information. When it was over, I sent her an email saying, "This is what happened, and it's all taken care of. Next time, just send it to me directly." Ordinarily, I would have said, "You created an incredible hassle, you called them, you got this whole big machine going, you gave them bad information, and, and, and, and...."

Instead, I was done with it in two minutes, as opposed to hours of bad feelings. That's happening with everything in my life. I close the door if an open door bothers me. I pick up the shoes if the shoes bother me. Taking action is a very, very small price to pay to avoid the upset. The effort doesn't even consume much time. In fact, taking action myself is quite a bit easier than trying to change someone else's behavior.

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At work, virtually nothing earth-shattering happens now. I'm much more oriented toward turning our inappropriate, stupid, or poorly executed activities into learning experiences. I realize the only way I'm going to transform the situation into a learning opportunity is simply by not being upset with anybody over it. I can honestly say I have *not* expressed considerable upset with anybody or anything since the day I arrived, which is just hugely different from how I operated in the past.

Here's an example from home. The night before last, I had a long conversation with one of my daughters. I'm advising her to make the choice to be a lawyer based on the lifestyle she prefers rather than making the choice based on the prestige of the law firm. In the greater scheme of things, I offered that working for a ninth-rated law firm, versus number 8 or number 6, pales in comparison to making the choice of being where you want to be and doing what you want to do. I suggested that she would have a much longer life of happiness being where she wants to be instead of obsessing about the perfect job spot. I also suggested she look at academia, even though it pays substantially less than corporate law, since the educational environment offers more time to think, more time to reflect, and more time to play with ideas rather than handling the work of the work. As we talked, I was curious whether my daughter thought I would have given the same advice two or three years ago. She said, "Not a snowball's chance in hell, Dad." She said she's so much happier asking me for advice now.

My mother-in-law doesn't bother me anymore; my sister doesn't bother me anymore. All of these people, who were enormous sources of negative emotional energy, are now either positive, or they're completely incidental. When I look at the structure of the day, the kinds of things I get done, and the pleasure I derive, my life is a thousand times better.



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I find myself with more time to read, more time to think, more time to play. Each morning, I wake up not being remotely apprehensive about what might happen during the day or about what's on my calendar, even if the day looks challenging and filled with meetings.

I can also see the effects of insight thinking in my response to handling unexpected issues with my customers. A major customer came to see me yesterday evening. I know he's got financial problems. When he called and said he wanted to visit, I absolutely knew he was coming to tell me of his financial issues. Even so, I was truly delighted to see him. He did, in fact, tell me he has financial problems and needs to string out some deliveries and payments. Now, remember, I'm critically dependent on this customer's money and activity. But I just looked at him and said, "I understand. I really appreciate you talking to me about your situation. We'll figure it out." Then, I went home with no worry and had a great evening. My customer was so relieved by our process of interaction, he hugged me. Now, you usually don't hug somebody when you say you have to postpone a \$10 million delivery. My sense is that reactions from others are substantially more positive.

I find I get less hung up on a situation, even if somebody responds out of proportion. Tuesday, I had a meeting where a subordinate went a little nuts about the direction we are taking as a firm. The conversation went on and on and on and was getting to be a bit of a broken record. Finally, I just looked at him and said — not in a condescending tone, "I'm listening to your concerns about what we do, but I wonder if you made a bad career choice?"

By the time I got home at 9:00 that night, I found a note from this fellow saying he felt I threatened to fire him. I just looked at his message and laughed. Then, I wrote back: "First of all, I wouldn't threaten to fire you — certainly not in the heat of discussion and not in public. Second, I wouldn't threaten to fire you because, no matter what, I wouldn't fire you on the basis of a disagreement. We need disagreement." Then I wrote, "There is no doubt I could be guilty of asking a smart-ass question that probably was inappropriate in a group. For that, I apologize. But that's about it, my friend." An hour later, I got a response from him saying, 'Thanks so much for responding quickly. I probably over-reacted.' As a result, the issue went away instead of taking on a life of its own and leaving the impression of 'Oh-my-god, the president threatened to fire a staff member because of his views.'

The biggest metaphor for my most powerful insight is that line from Gilbert & Sullivan: "It really doesn't matter, matter, matter, matter." Everything is very straightforward, very simple. I don't find myself immersed in any of the complexity.

I still work very hard, particularly when I interact with people. Last night, I was with some employees for a couple of hours, and they started getting into the standard kind of complaining mode. I just looked at them and said, "What do you want me to do with your complaints? You need to understand I listen to everything everybody tells me, and I try to make stuff better. But when I investigated some of your prior complaints, they turned out not to be true. I find it enormously difficult to invest substantial amounts of energy in tracking down your complaints when you're not completely forthright and honest." And they said, "You're right. You shouldn't have even pursued this because we weren't honest."

I no longer find it very difficult to explain my behavior in a forthright, uncharged way. I've always been forthright, but I used to be more charged, more exercised. I'd blow up and then have to explain why. Now it's just a calm conversation.



I'm well known for taking too much time trying to get at the analytics of an issue. Now, I'm more likely to just know what to do — like the results of all the analytics are already in my head. Overall, I feel as effective a human being as I can ever recall feeling.

Oh, yes. One final surprise. . . . Usually, I love delving deeper to more fully understand things I'm excited about, but with insight, I feel if I spend a lot of time trying to understand it, it might disappear.

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*Joel - This was written a few months after the author moved from COO of a \$10B retailer to become CEO of a major service organization. He has been working with insight for about six months.*

1 508 788 9890

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