



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
Edition 19: Emotional Duality

1440 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **5.76** minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the Principles of Happiness and Positive Emotion in your life and work.

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I. LIVING IN EMOTIONAL DUALITY

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion." ~Dale Carnegie

One evening two weeks ago my sweetie and I stepped out for our daily walk. After storms earlier in the day, things had dried off enough that we'd been able to eat our late supper on the deck. Everything around us glowed with that special "greenness" that signals Spring in its full glory. The sky lit up occasionally from distant lightning – like our own Northern Lights.

We were just a few minutes along on our mile walk when we heard thunder. Cheryl gripped my hand and suggested we turn back.

It was such a pretty night for a walk that I hated to cut it short. So after the next lightning flash I began counting, like I learned as a child: "one thousand, two thousand, three thousand,..." We heard nothing until I reached ten. "See," I said, "the storm is over ten miles away. We're fine." Her hand relaxed and we kept walking.

Soon we were lost in our conversation, no longer paying attention to the faraway storm.

As we rounded the cul-de-sac – our halfway point – and headed back, I noticed the wind had picked up a wee bit. As we crossed the street at the two-thirds mark, we became aware of a whispering sound ahead – like wind in the trees.

We looked at each other as the sky lit brilliantly, followed mere seconds later by a substantial roll of thunder. Hmmm. Maybe we ought to walk a bit faster?! Cheryl put her arm in mine and we picked up the pace. A few houses later we discovered the source of the whisper, as scattered drops began to fly at us, rapidly increasing in size and frequency.

I looked up and realized several things simultaneously: (one) there was no visibility starting four houses away; (two) a solid wall of water was coming at us, fast; (three) the rain was warm and



sweet and smelled wonderfully fragrant; (four) Cheryl had drawn in very close; (five) I was about to be totally soaked; and (six) we were standing in the street under a long stretch of very TALL trees – as lightning flashed directly above our heads!

Now, I have to confess that I love to *walk* in a pretty spring rain and I love to *watch* a good thunderstorm. A walk in a thunderstorm, however, is...stupid. As Cheryl and I, without exchanging a word, moved quickly from a brisk walk to a flat out run, I felt a jumble of conflicting emotions: raw fear, protectiveness, embarrassment, exhilaration, and even joy.

I was holding these opposites all at once and by the time we rounded into our driveway – which had become a small lake – and ducked onto our porch through a waterfall from the overflowing gutters, my heart was pounding a million miles a minute and I could not tell if it was the adrenaline rush of fear and panic or simply a rush of excitement that was in charge.

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Well, why did it have to be one OR the other? In reflecting on my experience, I realized how often I insist on “Just one emotion at a time, please.”

In coaching, I sometimes ask the question, “what are you feeling right now?” and my client responds, “I don’t know.” Sometimes that triggered in me a ‘Search’ button – we must dig down until we find The One emotion.

What my storm run helped me realize is that “I don’t know” often translates to, “I’m feeling several emotions right now, and I don’t know which of them to give attention to.” Well, how about first we name them all, and then address them one at a time. How is each valid? What message is it sending you? How might you respect it and honor it and hear it, while also honoring the other feelings? Each and every one of your emotions is affecting you right now.

I have applied this “new-found wisdom” in several situations since the run, and discovered that Emotional Duality, as I am calling it, shows up more often than I would have guessed.

Last week a client showed up practically giddy about a huge project completion. He said he felt “totally happy.” I sensed something underneath and asked, “what else are you feeling?” Turned out he also held a lot of sadness around the dissolution of the team and some concern about his next assignment. We had a wonderful conversation exploring what he needed to do to say goodbye to his team and prepare for his next role.

The happiness was great, and he needed to enjoy that. At the same time, it overwhelmed the other emotions that needed to be heard.

**Do this for yourself: Listen to the quieter emotion**

Reflect on this duality. How often are you in two or more emotions at the same time? Pride for a child’s accomplishment mingled with apprehension about the larger part they must now play? Frustration with an aspect of a job that otherwise provides joy? Sadness with relief (e.g. funeral for someone long ill)? Determination to accomplish a goal, yet resignation about conditions that affect your situation?

When you feel conflicted, try naming your emotion, then notice if there is a quieter one lying



