

The Emotional Economy

You're at the supermarket checkout. You're unloading your goods onto the conveyor belt and you offer a rushed cursory greeting to the checkout person, who greets you with a beige sounding 'hi' in return. No one makes eye contact during this initial greeting and there is a slight glance up towards the end as you swipe your credit card to pay. With your goods loaded into your trolley, you make your way home.

This is an interaction we may all have had in the past. It might be time to ask ourselves, through this interaction, what have we contributed the emotional economy?

Humans are driven by emotions. We like to think that we use our logical mind to make decisions on the important aspects of life. But when we weigh up the pros and cons of buying a family home, making or accepting a proposal of marriage, or firing a staff member, we do so mostly through the use of our emotions.

Our reactions to others, and theirs to us, have a far-reaching impact, both emotionally and physically. Like the exchange of any currency of value, we can, and certainly do, exchange emotions with other people. When you arrive at work in a bad mood, you are able to pass on some of that gloom to those around you. When you offer a genuine smile to a customer, you pass on a piece of happiness. This describes the emotional economy.

Every interaction has an emotional undertone. We each have the power to make someone else feel a little, or a lot, happier, as well as a little, or a lot more sad. And after the interaction has passed, our demeanour stays with us as an emotional afterglow. This series of collected daily afterglows are what allows us to decide whether we've had a good day or a bad day. We tally up the good interactions and the bad interactions as a net gain or loss for the day and if we have a net gain of

positive interactions, that makes for a good day. On the other hand, a distinct lack of positive interactions, or worse the perception of significant negative interactions, amounts to a net loss of positivity and we conclude that it's been a bad day.

The emotional economy has one critical difference to a currency exchange and that is perceptible choice. We make conscious choices as to whether to give or receive money in exchange for goods or services. We are far less aware of our choices in giving and receiving emotions. Although we are often less aware of our power to choose what we give or receive emotionally, the power does exist within each of us.

So, we have a challenge for you this month. Your challenge is to spend one entire day, from the moment you wake, until the moment you go to sleep that night, sharing only positive emotion with every single person you encounter during that day. That includes family, friends, work colleagues, acquaintances and strangers. Use all available means you have to provide a positive experience to those with whom you interact. It can be as simple as making eye contact and smiling. It can be more involved such as expressing generosity, empathy, or actually being helpful. At the end of the day, as you drift off to sleep, be aware of how you feel. Ask yourself, was today a good day or a bad day?

The holiday season is on the horizon, and with it comes a combination of

stress and joy. At some point during December, as we do year round, we will experience both positive and negative emotions. When you feel good, know you are able to share it around. When you are at the check out loading your groceries smile a genuine smile, the kind that comes through your eyes, and pay it forward. And when someone is feeling stressed or rushed, know that you have the choice as to whether you accept their currency. 💡

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