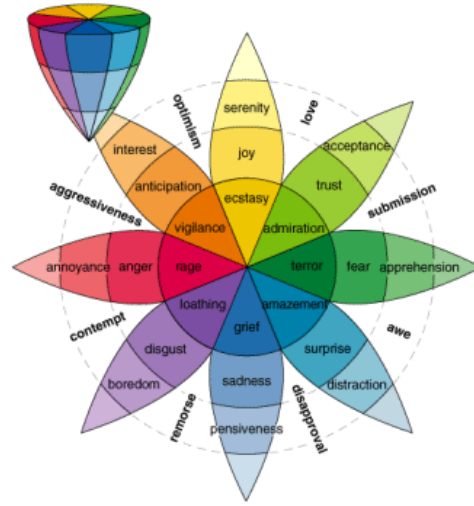


## The Minute and a Half Management System By Shelley Roy

Yesterday was a glorious day! I sat in my floatie, surrounded by the crystal clear waters of North Twin Lake, gazing at a perfect blue sky, reading an amazing book; *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey* by Jill Bolte Taylor, PhD. For months now I have been vexed by the prevailing views about emotions/feelings. I have been focusing on two positions: one, that they are arbitrary reactions based in external stimuli, and two, that until we get in touch with our feelings, we cannot resolve what we view as the negative past. A classic question asked during counseling sessions or in conversation with people who believe they are dealing with difficult situations, "How did that make you feel?" illustrates these positions. And now here I was, relaxing, trying to be in the moment, and my reading brought me face to face with another's thoughts about feelings.



In her book, Dr. Bolte Taylor talks about three ways we use the word *feel* and how each might be better understood if we keep the brain in mind. The first way refers to signals generated by the cells of the limbic system that we are aware of as joy, anger, sadness etc. The second involves the sensory systems engaging the post gyrus area of the brain when we tactilely experience the world around us and we think, for example, "This material feels rough." The last type involves higher order cognition and activity in the right hemisphere of the cerebral cortex; when we experience this type of brain activity, we typically say we are having a gut feeling. I believe that the feelings that involve the limbic system are what the counselor seeks when asking, "How did that make you feel?" and what most people are talking about when they say they feel; happy, sad, angry, frightened etc. Many people attribute their emotional state (feelings) to what is happening around them as if they have no control over their emotions. This is a very stimulus-response view of human behavior, I think of it as *old school thinking*.

The study of human behavior has 200 year old roots in stimulus response paradigms. First the stimuli were thought to be outside of us as epitomized by Pavlov and his salivating dog. Then the stimuli were moved inside of us as exemplified by Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. I believe that *feelings*, like everything in our systems, are generated by a relationship of factors, not by stimuli inside or outside of us. Here's an example: the telephone rings and we answer. Why do we do that? Old school thinking would explain that we were conditioned to answer it, often through rewards or punishments or because we have a need perhaps to be connected. Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) asserts that the answer lies in relationships, specifically the relationship between our reference perception and our perception. We need to take a step back from Bolte Taylor's explanation to move away from *old school thinking* and to move towards

PCT by asking why the limbic system is activated. The limbic system engages when what we want and what we think we are getting do not match, in PCT this is called error. Error is the difference between the desired state and our perception of the present state of anything. It is not a matter of only what we want, nor is it a matter of how we are recording what is happening, it is about the relationship between these two. The greater the 'mismatch' the more active the limbic system becomes. This brain activity produces chemicals which surge through the body and are gone 90 seconds after their production. What does this imply? Put simply, nothing inside of us or outside of us makes us feel anything. When we are angry, happy, joyful, or sad there is a mismatch between what we want and what we think we are getting. Some studies suggest that the chemistry may be the same for different emotions. Thinking of feelings in terms of relationships might explain how the same chemical combinations may be given different emotional labels.

When the phone rings, our system records the sensory information, which is compared to a desire we have at that moment. Our thinking might be something like this - "There's a sound", to "It's the phone ringing." to an association, "Someone wants to talk with me." to a question, "I wonder who it is?" To get a closer match between what we desire and what we perceive, we act. In this case we probably answer the phone because there's a mismatch between wanting to know who is calling and knowing who is at the other end of that anonymous ring. Of course, people who have phones with caller I. D., or have specified ring tones for different callers may be able to learn the identity of the caller without answering the phone, and that ability could lead to a different relationship followed by a different action.

Feelings then become the label we give to the mismatch between what we want and what we think we're getting. For example, when I want to feel loved and I'm not feeling loved, I may say I'm sad or depressed. Or when I want to hear a baby laugh and I tickle him and he laughs, I may express this experience as joy. Have you ever had a sensation of butterflies in your stomach? What was happening when you had that sensation? The sensation that I have when I'm excited about the first day of school, when I'm walking on stage to present to a crowd, or when I'm on my way to face my boss knowing that I'm in for a lecture is essentially the same sensation; the same chemistry, what I think of as butterflies in my stomach. In each of these states, what I want and what I think I'm getting have activated my brain chemistry through the limbic system and even though the chemistry may be the same, I would give each situation a different emotional label. Check it out for yourself. See if you can't think of sensation you have that you label with different emotional words.

This relational explanation awards us more control over our feelings and emotions. It implies that emotions happen only in the moment. First if we can learn to wait a minute and a half, while the chemistry courses through our system we may *feel* differently. Remember the old strategy, "Count to 10." This technique makes sense if we can shift our chemistry and therefore our *feeling* in less than two minutes. Think of the power in managing your life in 90 seconds. Secondly if we change either what we want or how we are recording our experience we will naturally create a different relationship and therefore change our *feelings* and probably our actions. The long and short of it is this, no

one and nothing can make us feel anything we don't want to, and we cannot make someone else feel something. So the next time someone says "You made me feel so \_\_\_\_\_." You might follow up by saying "Wow look at all the power you just gave me. Thank you for giving me power over you!"

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