

What is Your Emotional Sine Wave?

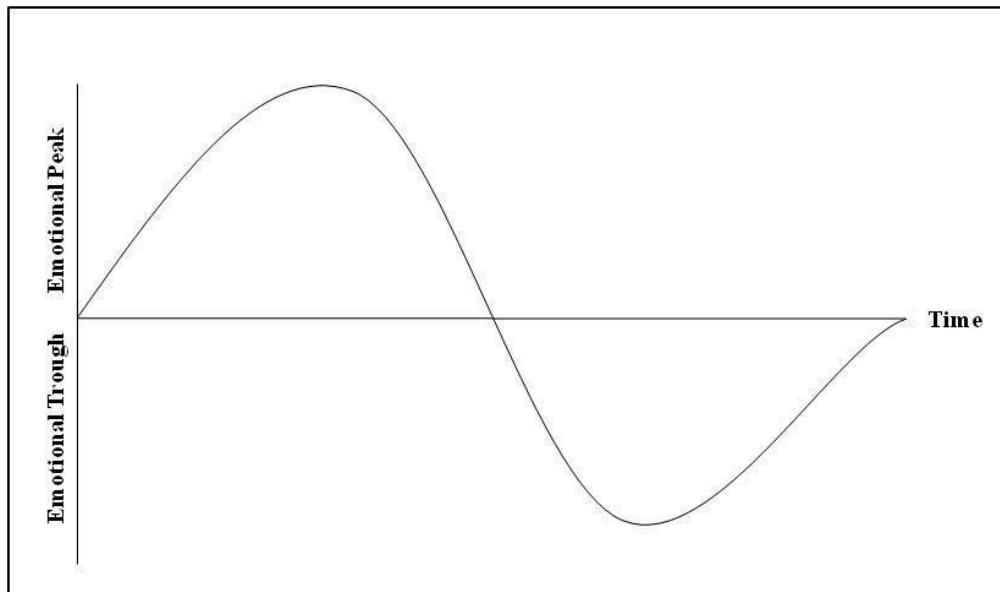
13 Tips to Survive the Troughs and Get More Joy from Life

Disclaimer from Justin: I'm not a therapist. I'm an emotionally sensitive businessperson, who spent 2 years as a banker and 5 years as a hedge fund investor. These are volatile businesses, where your emotions (and your schedule) constantly get 'blown up'. These tips helped me survive.

Mental health as math

Society often misunderstands what mental health is:

- Every week I feel both optimistic AND pessimistic. Huh?
- Feelings are not a permanent state of being. They come in cycles
- The closest mathematical description is a sine wave
 - o Ongoing waves of peaks and troughs
 - o Some days have higher *volatility* (higher highs and lower lows). Other days have higher *intensity* (multiple highs and multiple lows).



Sample Emotion Functions:

1. Normal day for normal person (has a peak and trough, but not overly volatile or intense): $y = 1 \sin 1x$
2. Volatile day for normal person (higher highs and lower lows): $y = 2 \sin 1x$
3. Intense day for normal person (multiple highs and multiple lows): $y = 1 \sin 2x$
4. Volatile *and* intense day for normal person: $y = 2 \sin 2x$
5. Typical day for a *sensitive* person: $y = 2 \sin 2x$
6. Typical day at a stressful job: $y = 2 \sin 2x$
7. Typical day for sensitive person at stressful job: $y = 2 \sin 4x$
8. Rollercoaster day: $y = 4 \sin 4x$
9. Person who meditates (smoothes the volatility and intensity): $y = \frac{1}{2} \sin \frac{1}{2} x$
10. Pure Joy: $y = 4x$
11. Pure Depression: $y = -4x$
12. A constant sense of calm: $y = 1x$

For mental health, a person should have 2 goals:

1. Survive and recover from emotion down cycles (which are inevitable)
2. Find ways to permanently alter the cycle itself (For the nerds - you need to alter the emotion cycle from something like $Y = 2 \sin 2x$ to something resembling $Y = \frac{1}{2} \sin \frac{1}{2} x$)

If you're an entrepreneur or investor (or have any stressful job), then your capacity for work is directly proportional to your ability to manage your emotions

13 tips that have helped me:

Tips #1-3: These are less frequently mentioned

1. The 5 Senses Refresh:

Wash away icky feelings by using your 5 senses to trigger a happy, calming memory. Ideally, compound the effect by triggering multiple senses *simultaneously*. The below is what works for me (none of these are "logical"):

- a. **Sight:** A happy painting (for me *Cafe Terrace at Night*), the ocean, the forest, Christmas lights, candle light
- b. **Sound:** Running water, upbeat or classical music, crashing waves, birds chirping
- c. **Smell:** Spruce trees, cinnamon, vanilla, beachwood, the sea
- d. **Taste:** A nice latte, pancakes with maple syrup, red wine, a smoky scotch
 - i. The above items all trigger memories of friendship and good atmosphere. In German, I would say feelings of "Gemütlichkeit"
 - ii. There may also be certain foods that when eaten, cause your stomach to *physically* feel more calm. You'll have to learn through trial and error. My own are: Greek yogurt, green and orange vegetables, fish, oatmeal, and herbal tea
- e. **Touch:** The feel of damp earth, the feel of hard oak, running sand through my fingers
- f. **Special note:** The forest, ocean, and mountains have unique power. They hit multiple senses *simultaneously*
 - i. The forest is so powerful, that certain cultures have special words to describe the impact. Japanese and Chinese have the word 森林浴 (forest bathing). German has the word "Waldeinsamkeit" (the feeling of being alone in the forest)

2. Laugh more:

Senator Alan Simpson once said "Humor is the universal solvent against the abrasive elements of life"

- Humor helps to interrupt fight/flight responses.
- Numerous American presidents from both parties (Abraham Lincoln, George Bush Sr., George Bush Jr., Barack Obama, and FDR) have used humor to deal with the stress of war and politics
- Humor doesn't imply weakness. Humor doesn't imply a lack of importance

Here's 3 tips:

- a. Create a laugh library
 - i. Movies & TV Shows: Mine are When Harry Met Sally, Seinfeld, and Dave Chappelle
 - ii. Silly Comics: Mine are Calvin & Hobbes, Farside, and Tundra
 - iii. Funny memes, posters, or quotes: My favorites are from Oscar Wilde
- b. Build a humor network
 - i. Most people build a professional network. You should spend equal time finding people who make you laugh. Build a "humor" network
 - ii. For me depth is more important than breadth (the exact opposite of a professional network). People rarely make jokes unless you're close or familiar
- c. Be like Seinfeld
 - i. Constantly search your environment for minutia (or pranks) that you find amusing (gossip, quirks of human nature, bizarre circumstances, etc.). Be like Seinfeld

3. Joy bursts:

Small, habitual activities that cost little but bring great joy. These activities have 3 attributes: they're social, they're repeatable, and they're inexpensive. Some examples:

- a. I cook weekend brunch with my wife. Every week. If the apocalypse comes, it can find us eating Sunday brunch
- b. I play pool with a friend every week
- c. I play a midwestern card game called Euchre. Every week.

- d. I sing tenor in a choir. I'm not good, but enjoy harmonizing with others
- e. Shooting hoops. Whatever icky feelings I might have (anger, despair, fear, etc.) get left on the basketball court
- f. Daily walks in the park. If homeless and bankrupt, I'll still be walking in the park
- g. When FDR was president, he would host a daily cocktail hour - to laugh and to see his friends. If FDR can do this while fighting the Great Depression and beating the Nazis, you too can find the time

Tips #4-13: These are more frequently mentioned and easily Googled

4. Meditate

5. Shorten your commute

- a. The book "The Blue Zones of Happiness" (and numerous others) highlight length of commute as one of the single greatest influences on daily happiness
- b. It's hard to be happy when you're stuck in traffic 2 hours a day

6. Physical support: Sleep, diet, physical activity

- a. Special note: Eliminate hidden physical triggers. For me - feeling cold triggers shivering, and shivering is associated with fear. For 2 years I always felt "fear" at work. Turns out I was just cold
- b. Special note: Certain activities may have super power. I love playing basketball but dislike jogging. 20 minutes shooting hoops will turn any day into a good day
- c. A comfy bed has the highest ROI of any purchase you'll ever make

7. Self esteem: You are not your LinkedIn profile

- a. You are your values. You are the friends you keep. You are the things you care about. You're human. You are not some label on LinkedIn
- b. I'm extreme:
 - i. I avoid LinkedIn whenever possible. I find jobs through referrals and references
 - ii. Even at networking events, I rarely ask where someone works or where they went to college. I usually ask "What are your favorite things to talk about?"
 - iii. If someone tries to label me (or asks questions I perceive as objectifying), I tend to blow up at them

8. Determine your top 3 values

9. Keep "Fk You" money**

- a. Save up one year of living expenses. This way, if your job ever requires you to compromise your values (see #8), you can say "F**k you, I'm out."
- b. Until you have one year of living expenses saved, you should be extremely frugal (as in "live in a backyard trailer" frugal)
- c. This gives you the luxury to choose who you do business with (because you have no urgent need for money)

10. Deal with your illogical fears

- a. Often these fears stem from childhood. Dealing with them may involve therapy
 - i. I have a huge fear of being perceived incompetent. It took me 5 years to get better at managing it. I still have it. I have to manage it every day

11. Focus on the present moment (not the future or past)

- a. Dale Carnegie calls this "living in day tight compartments"
- b. Eckhart Tolle calls this the "the power of now"

12. Form a social support group (also called a 模合 or Mo-ai in Okinawa)

- a. This is a small group of close friends who support each other (not from work)
- b. See the book "The Blue Zones of Happiness"
- c. Many people in Okinawa are in a Mo-ai. Okinawa also has the most centenarians on Earth (people over age 100). Correlation isn't causation, but I'll take a leap of faith

13. Make progress on your bucket list (it will help you be more serene in tough moments)

- a. You'll feel an immense gratitude and the memories can't be taken - not by poverty, not by war, and not by the abrasive elements of life