

Thoughts Create Emotions

Should emotions be trusted?

COMMON BELIEF: You should always trust your emotions.

COMMON BELIEF: Feelings are irrational and can't be trusted.

So which is it? They're BOTH wrong.

Emotions and feelings are neither right nor wrong, accurate or not. Emotions are simply your body's reaction to what you are THINKING, whether you're thinking on purpose or not. Your belief system and other unconscious thoughts are happening on autopilot all the time, and often cause emotions. That's why sometimes you have NO IDEA why you feel the way you do.

So here's an example of why emotions are never either right or wrong... because they're just reacting to your thoughts...

- Think about something don't have (that you want). You may think you're unhappy because you don't have it, but that's not true. You are unhappy because of the THOUGHT of not having it.
- Have you ever been happy while not having it?
- If you didn't have it but didn't care, would you be unhappy?
- If you still didn't have it but were doing something that kept you from thinking about it, such as going down a roller coaster, would you be unhappy about it?
- You see, not having want doesn't make you feel bad. Thinking about it does.

Where do emotions come from?

In almost all cases, it is our thoughts that create our emotions. Sometimes our unconscious mind and senses are picking up cues from our environment that trigger emotions, such as reading a person's body language or facial expression and having an automatic emotional response or sensing danger and having an automatic fear response. However, the rest of the time it is NOT the outside world or the situation that causes our emotional reaction. It is the mental filter that the situation passes through—aka, our interpretation—that then causes our emotional reaction to the situation.

Situation → Interpretation (thought) → Emotion

In psychology this process is addressed in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is empirically tested and used in therapy, life coaching, and organizational psychology. CBT uses strategies to interrupt unhealthy thought patterns and use positive self-talk and imagery to redirect the patient's thinking in order to change their mood.

The key to understand here is that CBT provides evidence that we have control over our thoughts. And if we have control over our thoughts, we can control our emotions. It may be challenging to do this, but it is a skill that can be learned. Here's the process:

Recognize Emotion → Identify Thought → Change Thought → Change Emotion

Changing your thinking in order to change your emotion is the purpose of this video, and there are 2 ways to do this:

- **Focusing on something else (distraction):** When you're experiencing an undesirable emotion and identify that the cause is what you are thinking about, your first line of defense is to literally just change the subject of your thinking, just like you would change the subject of a conversation with another person if it isn't going anywhere good. Sometimes the best way to feel better is to focus, instead, on something that feels better. Stop thinking about the thoughts that are triggering your emotions and the emotions stop. Thinking about something positive makes you feel good. This is great, and it works, but it doesn't always work. Sometimes the thoughts aren't going to go away. They're strong enough you can't distract yourself from them. The situation you're judging in your mind is in your face and persistent. In that situation, you can reach for a new **PERSPECTIVE** that helps you think differently about the situation, and therefore feel better.
- **Finding a new perspective:** When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. Even in the same situation or with the same facts, if you change your viewpoint your experience of the situation will change. Here is an example: a man was visiting a friend's house and went into the kitchen to make some tea. He didn't find a tea kettle, and so poured water into a glass coffee carafe and placed it on the gas stove. He returned to the living room and minute later smelled something burning. He returned and found that the handle of the carafe had caught fire. He quickly put the fire out. He apologized to his friend and was feeling both embarrassed and guilty. His friend, however, was laughing and complemented him on his "fireman" skills. Same situation, different perspectives—and the result was completely different emotional responses.

Now, I'm going to take this further and make the claim that EVERYTHING IS CREATED BY THOUGHT. Everything.

So, if thoughts cause emotions, what do emotions cause? Decisions. And what do decisions cause? Actions. And what happens when you take actions? You get results. The results can be experiences, jobs, relationships, or objects like cars or phones. Actually, the objects themselves were created by thought. Really!

Thought → Emotion → Decisions → Action → Results & Stuff

Think about the phone or computer on which you are watching or listening to this program... Before you owned it, you (or whoever bought it for you) had to have the thought to buy it... and for it to be at the store, someone had to have the idea to stock it and sell it, and before that someone had to have the idea to make it and before that someone had to have the idea to invent it...

So, if you're using an iPhone, for example, Steve Jobs and his colleagues at Apple literally thought the iPhone into existence... but it doesn't start there... before that someone had to have the idea for a touch screen and someone else had to have the idea for apps and someone else had to have the idea for a cell phone and before that someone had to have the idea of a phone and before that someone had to have the idea of wanting to communicate over a distance... and before that someone had to have the idea to communicate in words and before that someone had to have the idea to communicate at all. And before that someone had to have an idea at all. And before that someone had to exist which means someone had to have a thought about... oh wait, never mind, let's not go there.

So, can you see how all of these ideas (thoughts) are what lead up to this piece of technology sitting in front of you? Can you appreciate that thousands of years of evolution of thinking has been conspiring so that you can be watching or listening to this right now?

It's pretty amazing, and I hope I've convinced you that thoughts create emotions, which leads to things.

So the question is... how do I control my thoughts?

First, let's give your thoughts a name. Let's go with "BOB." Here's how to take control back from your BOB:

- **IGNORE BOB:** Don't take BOB seriously. When BOB starts rambling on incessantly or hops on a negative train, imagine BOB has a funny voice or is wearing a clown suit. BOB is not you, and it doesn't know what it's talking about.
- **PROTECT BOB:** BOB's easily influenced, so always ask yourself if YOU really believe what it's saying. Pay special attention for any thoughts coming from BOB that sound eerily similar to things other people say (such as your parents, the media, authority figures). Choose what you expose BOB to wisely, because he's apt to believe it and repeat it.
- **OBSERVE BOB:** As often as you can, remind yourself to watch your BOB. Notice what it's thinking about. If you don't like what it's thinking about, **CHOOSE A NEW THOUGHT.** You're in charge. This is especially important if BOB is thinking about what you **DON'T** want or something that worries you.

It takes time to get good at controlling your BOB. You'll notice times when BOB runs off on a tangent of terrible thoughts without you noticing—sneaky BOB! Then you'll eventually notice what BOB is doing and you can **WHACK BOB** on the head—it's like playing Whack-a-Mole. Whack him and say "bad bob!" This stops the negative thought, giving you a moment to remember that you have a choice, and then pick a better **FEELING** thought.

The more you observe BOB the better you'll get at catching it in the act—you'll be able to interrupt BOB before your emotions spiral out of control.