

Be (A)ware: Strong Feelings Ahead!

There you sit, staring blankly at your computer. For the past two hours, you've been trying to put the finishing touches on tomorrow's training materials — but you can't. There's a knot in your stomach. Your mind wanders. "I've done this a hundred times before," you think, "what's wrong with me?"

You have a couple of choices:

1. Ignore the distress signals your body is sending you, and stay frustrated.
2. Pick up on those cues urging you to explore what's really getting in your way.

During trying moments, a look inside often reveals some powerful emotions churning beneath your surface. Identifying and accepting these feelings can get you back on track.

So you heed your internal alarm system and choose option #2. **Investigate.** When you take a moment to relax and turn your attention inward, you notice you're still feeling angry from last night's big blow-up with your father-in-law!

That kind of awareness gives you power. And it gives you choices where you saw none.

Whenever I'm about to set foot onto a stage, a set, or in front of a group of people whom I have been entrusted to teach, I recall the words of my favorite acting teacher.

"Be aware of what you're feeling. Acknowledge it. If what's going on inside you is not serving you — if it's not supporting your character's objectives — find a way to get yourself to where you need to be emotionally."

This is particularly relevant to us as trainers and coaches. Whether we're facilitating an executive retreat or designing a new e-learning system, our feelings can either support — or subvert — our ability to connect with our trainees. Inevitably, there will be times when we'll feel distracted, nervous, tense — often having nothing to do with the work at hand. Staying emotionally aware helps us keep our footing and achieve our goals.

Consider the case of those training materials you couldn't complete. Instead of allowing yourself to sit there stymied, you took action, explored, and discovered those lingering feelings from the fight with your father-in-law.

Now you know. You know the problem doesn't lie within the training itself, or with your colleagues or partner (to whom you've possibly been less than

pleasant today). Instead of some mysterious force keeping you from doing good work, you have identified the source.

It's akin to discovering that the scary noise in the middle of the night is just the wind blowing a tree branch against the side of the house. The noise is still disagreeable, and it is still there, but knowing what is causing it affords a level of comfort. You have loosened its grip on you. Awareness is power.

You probably can't leave work to resolve the problem with your father-in-law. But now that you've pinpointed what's holding you back, you are more likely to employ a variety of on-the-spot techniques that can help you feel, and perform, better: breathing or relaxation exercises; taking a break to reconnect with your best self; even expressing those feelings in a variety of ways. Awareness illuminates choices.

As training and development professionals, we each need to develop and practice a method of reading our emotions, so we can make the adjustments necessary to perform at our best.

While those in our industry increasingly recognize the benefits of emotional awareness (note the burgeoning field of emotional intelligence), many of our clients and employees still hesitate to mix work with emotion.

Understandably so. Many people are not entirely comfortable with the role their feelings play in their domestic lives, let alone their lives at work.

As a department manager with whom I recently worked said, "Once someone becomes aware that they're anxious about some impending test results, it's not necessarily going to make the feeling go away, or leave them in a productive place to write a report. Strong feelings might be better left not surfacing."

When you encounter similar resistance among your clients and trainees, and within yourself, remember: if strong feelings are there... they are *there* — whether they "surface" or not. It's likely those emotions are *already* interfering with that report writer's ability to work, even though they have not been consciously acknowledged.

Covering up or ignoring powerful emotions only heightens their potential to do harm. Acknowledging and accepting their presence doesn't necessarily make the feelings go away. But it enables you to gain the upper hand, and become more — not less — productive in the moment.

So close your eyes, take a few deep breaths... and have a look inside.



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