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Coaching Works Monthly

Emotional Composting

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Tools and Tips

When composting emotions, taking complete ownership of how you are feeling is key.

Making it a practice to breath slowly and deeply throughout the day will give your feelings room to expand, and help insure that you receive the "gift" of being emotionally present.

Effective questions are powerful tools for emotional composting. When in doubt, ask questions. This helps oxygenate the emotional compost pile.

Food for Thought

Love brings out that which is unlike itself.

When pursuing our innermost passions, uncomfortable feelings often arise

Emotional Composting™

Last February 14th, my wife and I surprised our 8 year old daughter with a few treats from the "Valentines" Day Fairy. Included was a very sweet note from the Valentines Fairy herself, written with my own left hand. My daughter looked at the note, and asked if I'd written it. She said the handwriting looked exactly the same as the notes written from the Easter Bunny and Santa Clause. Knowing that we were busted, my wife didn't want to spill the beans. So I fessed up, and told her the truth.



As you can imagine, she became quite upset. With the both of us listening intently, our daughter vented her feelings of sadness and anger, letting us know directly that she didn't appreciate being lied to. Fifteen minutes later, she'd become quiet, and started out the door to school. As she stepped outside, she turned to me and said: "If you give me eight dollars, one dollar for each year that you and Mom had lied to me about Santa, we'll be even."

Whew! Talk about an effective emotional management strategy; transforming the emotional upheaval of being "lied" to by her parents for the past eight years, and the loss of the magic of Santa (not to mention the Easter Bunny and Valentines Day Fairy), into a cash flow opportunity!

I call it Emotional Composting™, a simple, practical, and powerful approach in leveraging the transformative power of emotions, towards achieving one's goals, desires, dreams, and highest good. Rather than being selfish with one's feelings, it's a strategy of being *self-full* with these same emotions, resulting in enhanced emotional intelligence, increased levels of trust and honesty between self and others, improved alignment between values, passions, and goals, more effective and meaningful relationships, better communication and teamwork, improved decision making and leadership capabilities,

*An emotional composting bin
allows these emotions to be
leveraged towards future
success.*

unexpected and extraordinary outcomes and possibilities, and win-wins for all concerned.

Since this is also the topic of a book that I'm currently writing, ***Emotional Composting 101***, I thought I'd share a blurb or two about it with you here, in hopes that you might be able to take advantage of these principles, and leverage them to your heart's content. Let's start with a few fundamental truths about emotions. Emotions are:

- Quantum in nature (When emotions are expressed, what follows cannot be fully predicted. In other words, the possibilities are limitless, when emotions are put out on the table.)
- Energy in motion (E-Motion; emotions are creative intelligent energy in flow)
- Neither good nor bad in of themselves, regardless of how good or bad they may feel (although we may judge and label them as such, and respond and/or react to them with behaviors that can be viewed as either good or bad)
- Golden nuggets of truth (our emotions don't lie, although we can lie about our emotions)
- Rich informational sources (emotional pathways in the brain process information up to 100 times *more* quickly than cognitive pathways. As brilliant as our thoughts may be, they're still only "dial-up" when compared to the DSL download speed of emotions.)
- Bring our experiences to life (if a picture is worth a thousand words, then an emotion is worth a thousand pictures)
- Organic in nature (they are derived from a living organism...ourselves)

This last point is especially important, as it provides an entirely different spin as to how emotions help to either drive, or derail personal, professional, relational, marital, and/or business success.

If you've ever composted organic material (i.e., kitchen waste, plant matter, grass clippings, spoiled food, etc.), you'll know that the end result of the composting process is humus, a rich, fragrant, and fertile material that can be recycled back into the soil, which provides added value and promote vigorous plant growth, wherever it is applied. You may also know that aerobic composting (oxygen is present...an open environment) is a much faster and less odiferous process than anaerobic composting (no oxygen is present...a closed environment). In fact, organic material left in an airtight container will become extremely noxious, and may take years (or longer) to compost; the same material placed in an aerated composting bin might only take a few weeks to compost. That's a big difference.

Since emotions are organic, they'll also decompose with time. *Aerobic* emotional composting (emotions being experienced, acknowledged, accepted, and expressed freely, openly, honestly, and effectively in the here and now...an open relationship) helps to more quickly generate emotional "compost". This contains the most "nutritious" aspects of a person's emotional experience (i.e., awareness, clarity, confidence, insight, vision, perspective, wisdom, trust, etc.), which can be reinvested into one's personal life, relationships, marriage, job, career, and/or business, providing added value, and insuring future growth and success, in the areas where it is applied. When this reinvestment occurs in the moment (something we're naturally able to do as children), it's called being emotionally present, which is an extremely powerful experience. Open expressions of joy, love, laughter, sadness, grief, anger, passion, creativity, and excitement are all examples of aerobic emotional composting in action.

Some strategies which help facilitate aerobic emotional composting include:

- Taking an emotional "pulse" by identifying feelings in the moment
- Taking ownership of emotions by using "I feel statements"
- Identifying emotional "Hot Potatoes" and devising effective strategies with which to help more effectively manage them
- Making a conscious effort to build trust in important relationships
- Setting up fair and effective "rules of engagement" for difficult conversations
- Responding rather than reacting to others thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Allowing others to take responsibility for managing their own feelings
- Creating a healthy and balanced lifestyle which includes good nutrition, regular exercise, time for fun, relaxation, reflection, and a good nights sleep
- Investing time and energy pursuing dreams, desires, and passions

On the other hand, *anaerobic* emotional composting (emotions being withheld, avoided, minimized, repressed, denied, dismissed, and/or projected on to others...a closed relationship) slows down the emotional composting process. In fact, when an air-tight lid is maintained on emotions over an indefinite period of time, instead of completing the composting process, these emotions will grow old with emotional mold (they begin to feel worse

over time). Lingering resentments, uncontrollable anger, rage, depression, dread, hopelessness, guilt, shame, chronic fatigue, frustration, anxiety, stress, worry, and burnout are examples of uncomfortable emotions being kept under wraps over the long haul.

Some examples of actions which encourage anaerobic emotional composting include:

- Minimizing, rationalizing, and/or denying own or others feelings
- Being overly critical, blaming, and/or shaming of self and others
- Utilizing self-defeating or self-destructive behaviors
- Allowing "Pink Elephants" to freely roam the room
- Over-controlling behaviors and/or micromanagement of others
- Enabling behaviors and/or excessive handholding of others
- Relying on "quick fixes" to solve more deeply rooted problems
- Doing more of the same, and expecting different results
- Unethical and dishonest behaviors
- Isolating from others and/or creating "silos" in the workplace
- Disregarding dreams, desires, and passions

You may have heard that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Nothing could be closer to the truth. According to Wikipedia, the word "hell" is derived from the Germanic word "Hel", which means 'to cover'. This fits right in the wheelhouse of what drives anaerobic emotional composting. Trying to feel good about one's self, relationships, marriage, career, and/or business, by keeping a lid on uncomfortable emotions, is paved with wonderful intentions. However, when uncomfortable emotional truths are ignored over the long run, all hell can break loose. This isn't a matter of being good, bad, right, or wrong; it's just a basic law of emotional composting physics

The trick is to be open to the possibility that any feeling, regardless of how good or bad it initially feels, has the potential to create added value in the long run. The challenge is to make room in your emotional composting "bin", so that your emotions can begin to work for you, rather than against you. Otherwise, you could expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money trying to keep the door shut on a very wise, creative, and powerful part of who you are, when these very same emotions could be exactly what the doctor ordered.

My first job as a television Meteorologist is an example of this. Too tightly wound to admit that my insecurities were boiling over while being in front of the camera, I "white knuckled" my way through years of on-air television terror, until I could finally muster up the courage to say, that yes, being on live TV, with hundreds of thousands of people tuning in at home, put me way outside of my comfort zone. Once this nugget of emotional truth was out in the open, I could finally begin to relax, and really enjoy myself in front of the camera.

In order to do this, however, I needed to make room in my emotional composting "bin" for my insecurities. Since we haven't yet defined what a bin is, let's do that now. Metaphorically speaking, it's an invisible framework inherently built into all relationships (whether with one's self, between spouses, within families, among friends, with co-workers, among management teams, within executive boards, throughout the entire business culture, etc.), in which emerging emotions can be expressed, acknowledged, composted, and then recycled right back into the relationship, further enriching it. In essence, the relationship is the bin.

Relationships which compost the most effectively are those whose participants bring high levels of *THREE* to the table:

- **T**rust
- **H**onesty
- **R**espect
- Emotional awareness
- Effective emotional expression

When all *THREE* are high, the contents of the bin easily sustain the relationship, and the relationship flourishes. When all *THREE* are low, the contents of the bin become toxic, and the relationship ultimately derails. Knowing that these parameters (and the strategies used to build upon each) help fuel the bin, you can easily determine how well your important relationships compost emotions. These might include relationships with:

- Yourself
- Family
- Spouse
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Supervisor
- Direct reports
- Management or office teams
- Business partners
- Business associates

- Employees
- Customers/clients

Using a 0-10 scale (0 being low and 10 being high), you can rate your significant relationships for each of the THREE parameters, and then add these five numbers. The higher the number (50 max), the more aerobic the emotional composting, and the more likely it is that your relationship is thriving. The lower the number, the more anaerobic the emotional composting, and the more likely it is that your relationship is suffering.

Regardless of the numbers that you arrive at, the good news is that there is always room for improvement. This is especially so for relationships which are "oxygen" deprived, since they contain the greatest *potential* for emotional compost. While realizing this potential requires a well thought out strategy, and a long-term commitment of time, energy, and effort from all parties involved, by placing your focus on THREE, you'll become increasingly delighted with the results that you see.

Here's to your success!

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