

# The Upside of Negative Emotions

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Admit it!! You try to escape, or avoid negative emotions as soon as you experience any of these, right? It is no surprise. We're programmed to do that one way or another. It's painful to feel depressed, ashamed, anxious, guilty, and the host of other negative emotions. To many, these emotions convey weakness. We gravitate more towards positive emotions like joy, optimism, excitement, confidence, and other emotions that put us in a more upbeat mode. And we're not to blame as these kinds of emotions don't only feel good; they're good for us. They propel us to achieve better results and have better life experiences, in general, all culminating in a more satisfying sense of well-being.

For years I trained myself to shift my negative states to more positive ones in attempts to practice and hone my emotional intelligence. I help my clients do the same, but only after exploring what these negative emotions are trying to tell them. While it is true that many people present to a professional needing relief after experiencing intense one or more negative emotion, little do they know that these negative emotions were - in the beginning - their allies. That same experience they complain from is actually directing them to grow somehow, to be different, to take action, or to understand what is going on. I must emphasize, here, that most negative emotions in their mild form have their upside. Taken to the extreme, they end up in the person being in what may seem like a quagmire of relentless agony. What I will brief, next, is mainly based on scientific research.

Take, for instance, **stress**. We're often warned that stress is the enemy. In its extreme, I won't deny that it is highly correlated with a host of physical and psychological problems. What many don't know, though, is that moderate stress is actually good for you. It builds you up with arousal to rise to the challenge, unleashes your creativity, gives your life meaning, and strengthens your psychobiological resilience. Think of "Post Traumatic Growth" which people experience after a stressful experience. Not only do people report that such times stretch their coping muscles, it also changes them to the better in ways they never considered before. They start viewing life matters in a totally new perspective.

**Anxiety**, too, has its upside. If it weren't for anxious people forecasting a problematic future in some ways, many discoveries wouldn't have been brought to life. Anxious people are important for the human race. They care enough, too, not to engage in risky behavior because they can foretell negative consequences. They are, also, appreciated more by their friends and acquaintances because they are more considerate than others. Some anxiety provides you with enough bodily arousal to manage important tasks (e.g. a presentation, or an exam). Without such alertness, perhaps things are taken

## There's an Upside to Negative Emotions. Befriend These ...

- **Stress** Makes you rise to the challenge
- **Depression** gives you time to think of solutions
- **Anxiety** makes you careful
- **Guilt** makes you do something
- **Regret** makes you learn
- **Anger** makes you feel in power

*Take a moment to explore what they're telling you!*

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lightly and performance remains below desired standards. Anxiety can equip you with plan “A”, “B”, “C”, etc... all part of being a bit pessimistic in case things go wrong, so you're often more ready than an optimistic anxiety-free person. It is true, though, that sometimes anxiety can be too intense and chronic; thus, hampers both wellbeing and daily functioning.

Even **depression** is frowned on, when research suggests that mood dips enhance cognitive functioning. Rumination is a way to solve problems and dig deep for answers. People become more detail oriented in such states and don't miss out on information like happier counterparts would. If you have a project you'd like to undertake, consult with a depressed friend on their opinion. They'd surely help you uncover everything that could go wrong with it. Besides, low mood helps you communicate your feelings better (you've thought about things like a million times already and things are clearer by the time you open up).

What about **anger**? That emotion gives you power and can be used as a strategy to get what you want. In most instances, anger doesn't escalate to aggression (so that's good). It directs to problem solving and provides a lot of insight on important matters. Unexpressed anger, turns inward and leads to depression and other health-related issues. Anger masks a host of other negative emotions and tells you which of your values are being violated. When you express anger, you'd be giving the relationship with the other person more guidelines on what is possible and what is not. Beware of anger becoming a communication pattern and a personality style, as then it would convey only lack of control over one's responses.

**Guilt** plays a beautiful function too. It makes you rectify or make amends when you do others wrong. It's your moral compass especially for conscientious folks. Consider those who commit felonies without any guilt. If guilt was not there to warn the culprit, bad deeds would continue. Can you imagine, then, the kind of world we'd be living in? When you feel guilty, you're keeping your morals in check alright. Sometimes guilt hovers unnecessarily over one's psyche and it is totally unwarranted, so we need to make a distinction here on when it is truly valid.

**Remorse**, similarly happens “after the fact” and makes you a wiser person for similar situations (which may never come), but at least, you can offer others sound advice based on first hand experiences. Regret helps you mature into becoming a wiser person who's more careful and slower in important decision making; and who takes into account prior life lessons. When you ask yourself “what can I learn here?”, you're making good use of remorse.

When we consider **jealousy**, what a motivator this emotion is to be a better version of yourself despite its negative connotation. Jealousy of others who are inspiring raises the bar for you to work harder. It is admiration that makes some people strive to reach similar levels for things that they value. Even moderate romantic jealousy tells the other person they're important. When couples don't experience jealousy, sometimes it is not interpreted as trusting too much, but, rather, as having no basis for caring at all....

The list can go on and on for the upside of other negative emotions. They're important to make the human experience more whole. The light is appreciated more after the darkness. The same goes for positive and negative emotions. The trick is to make sure the experience remains in the milder zone and never to allow it to become chronic or too intense. This can be done through attempts at regulating one's emotions and interrupting them from escalating. In the end, sadness brings you peace; fear brings

you confidence; anger brings you power; confusion brings you clarity; guilt makes you grow; and regret makes you wiser. Aren't we better off befriending what we resist?

Your Personal Coach

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