EMOTIONS...THE BOSS OF YOU

If you want to escalate a problem, tell someone who's upset to "calm down".

In our last edition, we looked at the 7 motivations that we are all influenced by, subconsciously and almost instantaneously. To recap; those motivators were; self-protection, disease avoidance, affiliation, status, mate acquisition, mate defense and kin care. Whether it's Status on Mate Retention there are some common denominators in how any of the 7 motivators are brought to the foreground. They activate well below consciousness, adjacent to our "fight or flight" behavior; and in every event, they trigger an emotional reaction.

To find more mastery of our lives we must accept that we are driven, controlled, and subject to our emotions. We'll look at this closely with the goal of helping you find a path to becoming more in touch with what causes emotions and how to better process and manage them.

For 32+ years I worked with senior executives who were in our outplacement program looking for a new job. It was quite common for my clients to be stunned and out of touch with how they felt about being unemployed. I often quipped: "As a man of a certain age, I am not actually in touch with my emotions and need to go ask my wife how I feel." Those of us who are Boomers or older, were raised on the motto; "big boys don't cry." In general, humans are less rational and effective when in a high state of emotional arousal. If we cannot process our emotions we are even more impaired.



Managing emotions in similar to managing the weather. You cannot do much about whether it is raining or 99 degrees except acknowledge it and make adjustments to how it affects what you are doing and how well you can do it. We must start with what science say about how our emotions are produced.

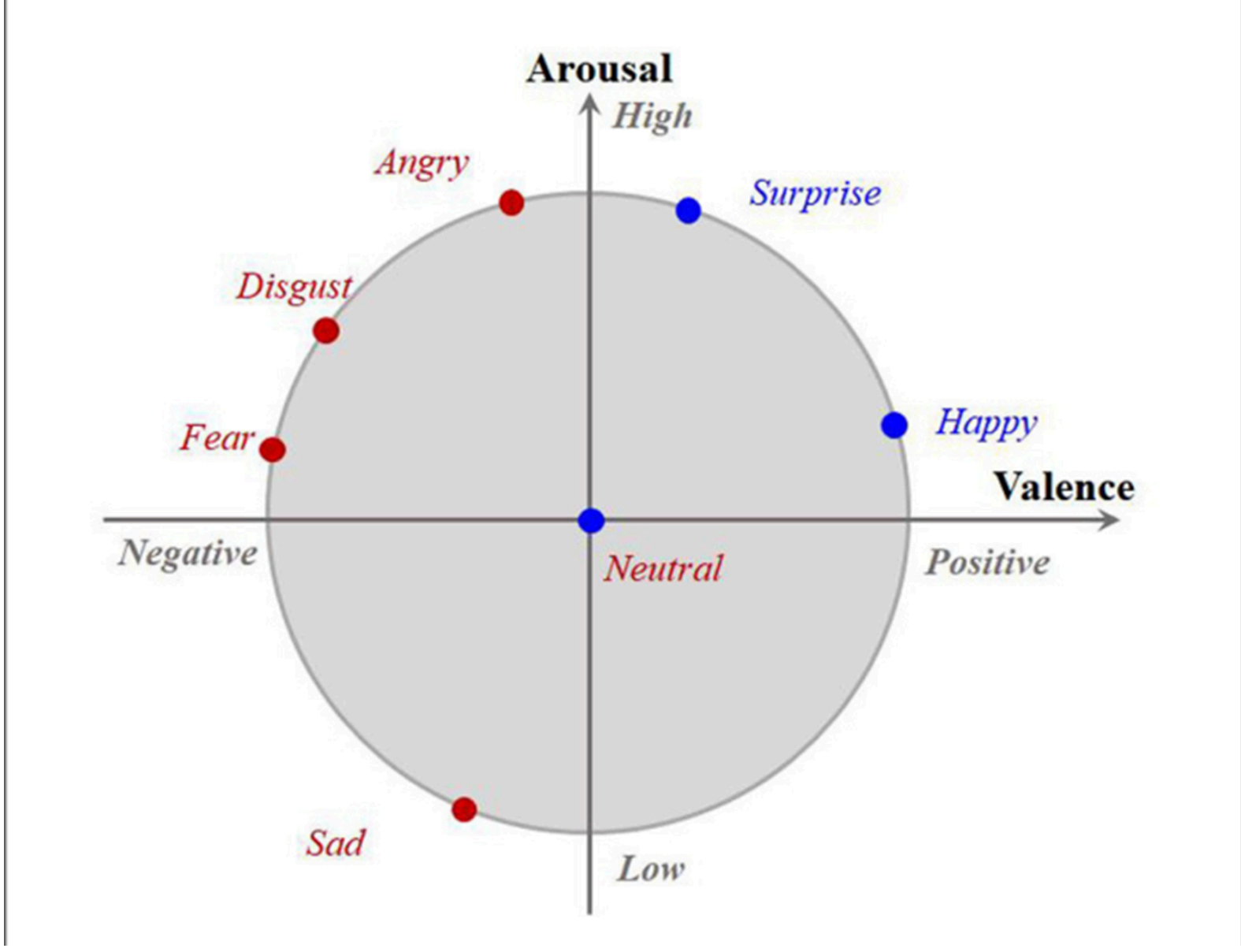


For those of you who don't know about the "XY" axis of emotion, it is going to either blow your mind, or trigger an extreme denial due to its simplicity. Both of those reactions are due to emotions so after you react, take some time to think about where your reaction fits on the upcoming graphic. In its most basic form, ALL emotions are on an intersection of two axes. One axis measures very low arousal to high arousal; the other axis measures pleasant to unpleasant. Once you've looked at the chart below and grasped how it works, take the time to place your current emotional state somewhere on the table.



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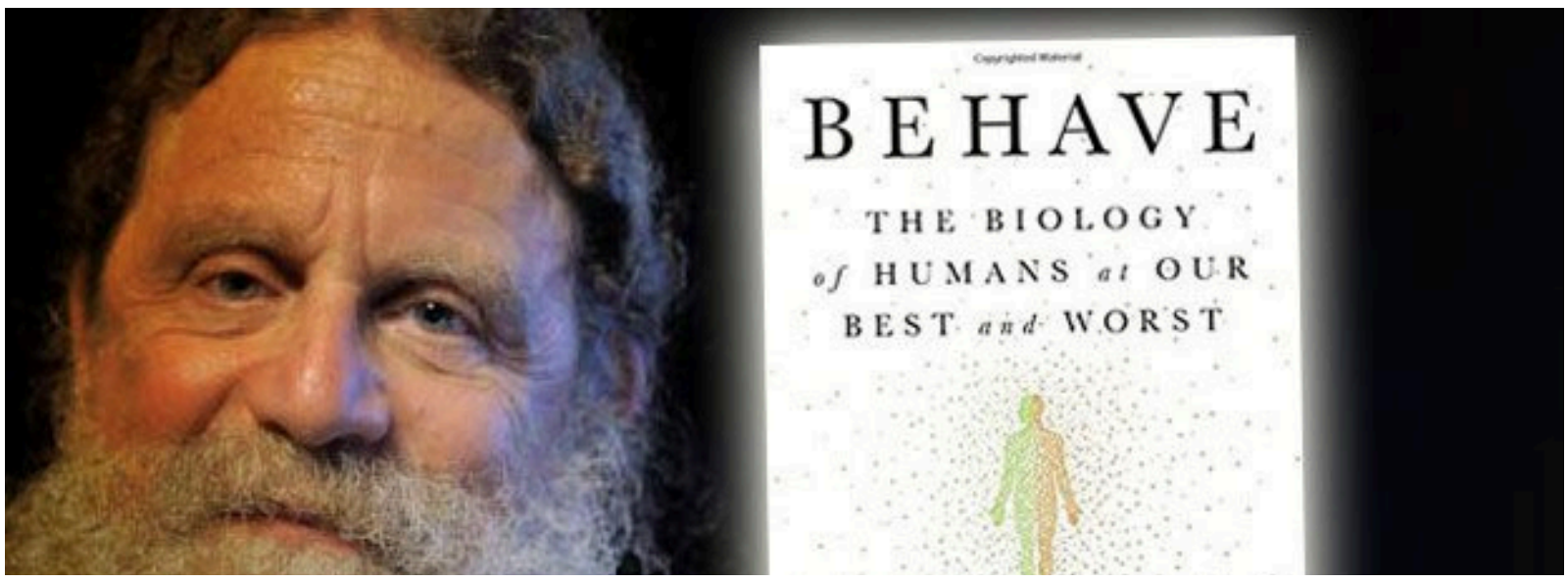
If you can be anything...
why haven't you?



I'm still gob-smacked by this chart. The first time I saw it, I viscerally challenged it as much as possible. It is a lot to take in. The idea that our whole emotional world can be reduced to a simple plus and minus of two sensations rocked me. My wife told me I felt anxious and indignant, and she would know better than me.

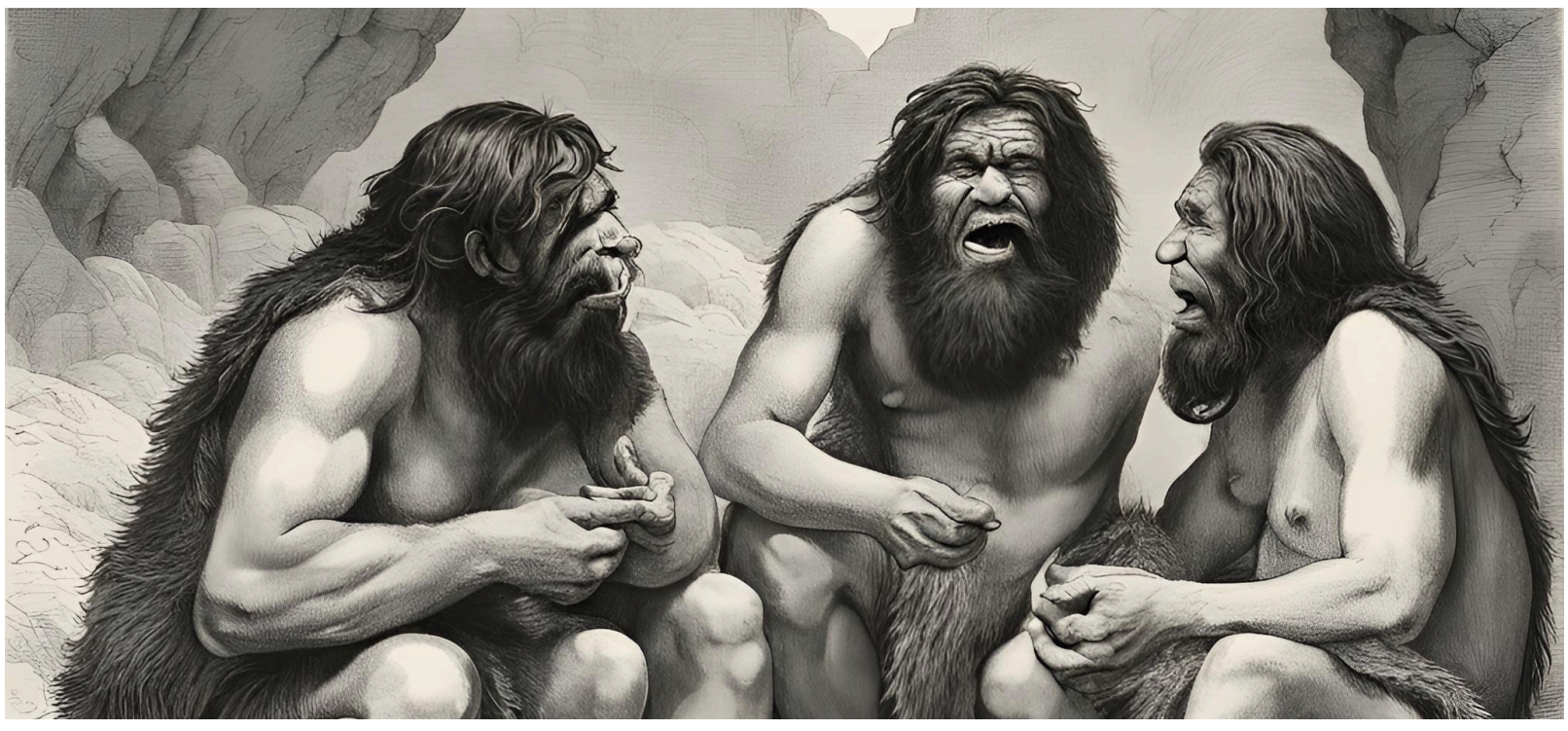


What is further confounding about this data, even if we know it to be true, is that we have very little ability to control our emotional reaction in the moment, and we are in good company. Robert M. Sapolsky, PhD of Stanford University, is widely considered to be one of the world's foremost authorities on Primates, Neuroscience, Neuro-Endocrinology, and Human Behavior. He has published countless books on the brain and human behavior, including **Determined**, and **Behave**. He has repeatedly, publicly stated that knowing what he knows, changes nothing about how he reacts emotionally.



Human vocabulary, and the majority of our writing outside of science, is comprised of attempts to share our experiences and therefore by default, our emotions. Let's take that a step further. Before the written word, stories told around the fire, were chock full of danger, violence, family, relationships, rising to power, love and death. These tales were instructional and socially binding. Over the millennia, humans have become more proficient at the manipulation of the physical world and of human behavior, including the emotions of others.





In the modern age, advertising, social media, TV, theater, books and movies are all designed to capture your attention and trigger feelings. This routine manipulation of your feelings has made you less sensitive to your emotions at a conscious level though the wiring still causes a reaction. It stands to reason that those vying for your attention feel the need to “up the ante” and push your emotional buttons even harder and more frequently.



What can you do with this information? While you are at the mercy of your emotions, perhaps your saving grace as a thinking mammal, is your ability to reflect on your feelings and process them. It is not easy to do so and requires practice to do it effectively. The world is attempting to influence the highly aroused part of your emotional universe, but delving into your feelings is best done in the low arousal, neutral to positive state.



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You must first slow down, before attempting to process your feelings. A heartbeat of 160+ is a guarantee of poor thinking. Stillness, quiet, meditation, prayer, slow walks in peaceful settings, sitting and observing nature are all ways to slow down. It might take you weeks of practice to achieve this calmer state. You will have lots of emotions to process and there is no rush to do the work until you can do so in the best state of mind for the effort.



This path is not easy. Nothing that works in opposition of our near instinctual behavior is painless or simple. You will likely avoid looking at your feelings from time to time. You may procrastinate or rationalize that "this time" doesn't need analysis. Often this is because your expectations are not aligned with reality. You may fear failure. It is not failure...it is change...it is learning a new thing.



As you become more effective in processing your emotions, you will find that they become less likely to create chaos in your everyday life. Being in touch with how you feel and why you feel that way is a path to a more productive and peaceful life. I know this is true because my wife told me. Jokes aside, people you love, and trust is a good source of the truth.

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

- VICTOR FRANKL

