

The Peaceful Productivity Podcast

Ep #82: How to Change a Behaviour



Full Episode Transcript

[The Peaceful Productivity Podcast®](#), with your host *Kim Christiansen*

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Welcome everyone. I'm Kim Christiansen and this is the Peaceful Productivity Podcast, where I share strategies to help you get the most out of your time and feel better in the process. Hi everyone, welcome to the Peaceful Productivity Podcast. I'm sitting here on a gorgeous March-Spring day. The sun is out and I'm feeling really energized. That energy, I think is what in part inspired the topic for today's episode because I was thinking a lot about energy and where energy comes from. Today I feel like it's coming from the sun.

But in general, how do we motivate ourselves, especially when we're thinking about changing a behaviour? I talk a lot about the alignment between our intention and our behaviour on this podcast. In fact, that's how I would define peaceful productivity is when there is that alignment between the intention and the action. I think I will spend an entire podcast talking more about forming the intention. And the reason why is because the intention itself can actually be very motivating, especially when it's coming from desire and not obligation.

I could spend a lot of time talking about that. So I'll talk about that in a future episode. Today what I would like to talk about is what's in between the intention and the behaviour. What if there's an intention that you have and you're not following through? Behaviour is not matching the intention. That's what I'd like to talk about today. So you might see this in different areas of your life. So maybe there's an intention to work out more, get in shape, exercise, eat better, that kind of thing.

And yet, when the moment arrives, the behaviour is not matching the intention. You might also notice this in other areas of your life, the intention to go to bed earlier or get up earlier, and yet you still can't seem to bring yourself to actually follow through. Maybe in your business, you've got the intention to make more offers. And yet, when it comes time to do it, you're not following through on that intention. So the follow through, the space between the intention and the behaviour, that's filled by an emotion.

The fastest way to change a behaviour, to start a new behaviour or change an existing behaviour, the fastest way to change that behaviour is to do some emotional work. If you're at the stage where you see a behaviour that you want to change, but what you're doing is not working, then this might be something that you want to try. So this emotional work, what I mean by emotional work, it's commonly referred to as emotional intelligence, or emotional regulation, or even emotional processing. I just call it emotional work.

This is a practice that I've developed over time to help me become more aware of how my emotions are impacting my behaviour. I remember the first time I found words to articulate this idea. I had had this idea for a long time, but I couldn't quite bring it to a level of conscious awareness because I didn't quite have the words for it. It was when I was reading for the first time Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. This was many, many years ago.

And I was reading that book, and he was talking about the time when he was in a library in Hawaii, and he was struck by the realization that he could build a pause between the emotion and the action. I remember reading that and then rereading it and then rereading it again, because for me, it finally gave me some language to apply to something that I had felt for a long time. And I now talk about that, that pause between the emotion and the action. I talk about that as either a reaction or a response.

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How that helps me is when I think about reaction, I'm talking about when you're simply doing an action as the result of an emotion without any real thought around it. Whereas a response is when you actually put some space in between that emotion and the subsequent action. Now it sounds really simple in theory, but to apply it, it takes a little bit of practice. So I'll talk a little bit more later on about what my practice looks like and some strategies that you might want to try if you're interested in some of this emotional work.

But before I talk about my practice, I just wanted to share some of the major behaviour changes that I've seen in my own life as a result of this emotional work. I used this when I wanted to stop over drinking. I also use this emotional work when I wanted to exercise more. I've also used this emotional work to improve my relationships and my communication. And most recently I've been using it a lot when I am working on my business.

In fact, that's one of the reasons why I started my own business was because I saw it as an opportunity to practice more of this emotional work. The beautiful thing that I've noticed is that the more I practice this, the better my results are. And the reason why is because my results are created by my actions. And when my actions are more in alignment with my intention, then I have higher quality actions and I have better results. This emotional work has been transformational.

Transformational in terms of really helping me with my perspective and feeling better in most areas of my life. But also I think really helpful in terms of accomplishing my goals and helping me to feel in alignment as I'm practicing this. So what is the emotional work that I'm talking about? The way I first started looking at it is there's cognitive work and then there's emotional work. And what I mean by cognitive work is the management of your thoughts.

Understanding where your thoughts are coming from, observing them and not necessarily getting hooked into these thoughts because recognizing that the thoughts are attached to the emotions. So that work is really, really important. The emotional work is once you've recognized that you have a choice around your thoughts and thought management, then the emotional work is also recognizing that you don't necessarily have to act from an emotion. You can create a bit of a pause there and choose your action versus simply feeling at the effect of your emotions.

So that thought-feeling combination really is at the root of all of our behaviours. When it comes to behaviour change, both are necessary because it's that combination that drives the behaviour, the thoughts and the feelings. However, I like to start with the emotional work because I think that work is the one that's perhaps most neglected. When we're growing up, we spend a lot of time in terms of cognitive intelligence. In fact, our whole reward and punishment system is based on cognitive intelligence.

When we do well in school and at work, we're often praised for our cognitive intelligence, for our ability to use logic and rational thinking and our problem-solving skills. So that is highly valued in today's society, but I noticed that the emotional work is not as often valued, although I see that changing. But when I was growing up, emotional meant something derogatory. Being emotional was synonymous with weakness, showing emotion, especially at work, was deemed unprofessional.

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So as a result, I think like many of us, I took that to mean that emotions were a waste of time and they were suppressed and cognitive intelligence was what was really valued. Truth be told, I framed my entire career on that foundation. It wasn't until I found words to articulate what Stephen Covey was talking about all along in terms of recognizing that you can pause between the emotion and the behaviour when I found words for that and the tools to actually practice that in my day-to-day life, that's when things really started to turn around for me.

If you're interested in this emotional work, what I recommend is to take a look at the behaviour that you want to change and link it back to the underlying emotion. This is really, really powerful because once you can trace back your behaviour to the underlying emotion, that's when you can start to build a bit of a pause in between the two. It starts with a bit of self-reflection. I think that's why coaching is such a valuable tool is because coaching is designed to ask questions, to explore what is driving our behaviour.

I thought I would walk through an example with you. For the purposes of this conversation, let's say that the behaviour that you're looking at is managing the finances in your business. Often my clients will come to me and they'll say that they're feeling lost when it comes to the finances in their business and they're not looking at them on a regular basis. They're not even really setting up financial systems for themselves so that they can look at it.

So whether it's setting up those initial systems or whether it's monitoring the systems that you've set up for yourself, let's just say for the purposes of this example that you're not paying as much attention to your cashflow in your business as you want to be. You tell yourself that this week will be different and then the end of the week comes and you still haven't opened up your financials. You tell yourself there's just not enough time to take a look at it.

Week after week, you find yourself avoiding procrastinating, not looking at your financials. This can become a bit of a vicious cycle because not only are you not looking at it, but the self-talk that's going on in your head perhaps is causing some guilt or some embarrassment, some shame, so there's avoidance that's layered onto the avoidance. So let's start there. Let's pretend for a moment that there's some guilt around the fact that you haven't set up your financial systems yet or you're not monitoring them on a regular basis.

The self-talk in your head sounds something like, I really should find the time to do this, but I'm too busy and the feeling associated with that thought is guilt. There could be other feelings associated with your business financial management system. It could be intimidation, it could be anxiety, it could be fear of making a mistake, it could be tedium, not wanting to be bored. There's a lot of different feelings that could be preventing you from setting up your financial management system or looking at it regularly.

So let's first pretend that you haven't set up the system yet. What I see quite commonly is that a lot of people won't want to set up a system because they're afraid of setting up something that's not going to be sustainable over the longterm. There's some anxiety around doing it wrong. If you can identify that emotion that's preventing you from taking action or that is causing you to take action that you don't wanna be taking, that is huge. That's where all your power is going to come from.

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So if you can get real and own the emotions that are driving the actions, that's the first step and that's gonna be a very powerful place for you to be. The reason why it's such a powerful place is because if you can recognize it in hindsight, like looking back on what you're doing, then you can start to recognize it in the moment. And once you've started to recognize how your feelings are impacting your behaviours, then you start to shift from reacting to those emotions, which would be in this case procrastination or avoidance.

And you can build a bit of a pause in there and choose the actions that you want to take. You're not being controlled by your emotions. Now you're back in control of choosing the actions that you want to take. It's like I was saying earlier about Stephen Covey and building the pause in between the emotion and the action. The beautiful thing about owning your emotions and linking them to the subsequent actions is that you give yourself a choice to choose a different action.

And you'll also find that as you choose your actions more deliberately, you no longer use your feelings as a reason to do or not do something. You no longer say to yourself, I don't feel like it. Then your actions become more deliberate and then you start to see progress as a result of your actions. And that's the way that you're going to interrupt that vicious cycle.

If you can first build the pause in between the emotion and the action and then you start to see results because of those actions, then it's going to reinforce the ability to insert the pause in between the emotions and the actions. In order to put this into practice, one of the most powerful questions that I ask myself routinely is how am I feeling right at this moment? I'm sure you've heard the phrase name it to tame it. And it's really easy to dismiss that idea as being cliché, but it holds a lot of power.

When you can say the words to yourself, I am feeling X, whatever that feeling is, you start to take ownership of that feeling. And that's where you get all of the power to start inserting the pause if you should choose to. This is why a coach can be so helpful. Because these aren't questions that we routinely ask ourselves. We just don't know what we don't know. Even when we do realize that there is value in doing this emotional work.

Sometimes it's just easier to get busy doing something than to get curious about how our feelings are impacting our behaviours. And I totally get that. My default brain would much rather be in action than in reflection. A bias for action is very helpful until it's not anymore. Busy just for the sake of busy is not productive. In fact, it's a source of chronic stress. What we notice about being busy just for the sake of being busy is it's an escape. It's trying to actually outrun the emotional work.

We tell ourselves that that emotional work is not valuable, that it's a waste of time, that we're not entitled to our feelings, that it's actually a form of weakness. But when we step back, we recognize that we can never actually outrun the emotional work. We can temporarily ignore it, overrule it, suppress it, push it down. But that's really what causes the chronic stress and the exhaustion. It's that resistance to the emotions.

A clue that you might be trying to outrun your emotions is if you feel like you're always in a hurry to accomplish your goal. If you're feeling like you're forgetting something all the time or you're feeling always late or you're impatient, that could be a clue that you're trying to outrun your emotions. So to

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help with that, the first step is just owning the emotions. When you recognize a feeling, tell yourself, I am feeling and then name the emotion.

If you would like any help changing a behaviour or getting your financial set up in your business, please visit my website at financialwellnesscoach.ca. Have a great day everyone. Are you looking for a coach who will help you increase your business profit while protecting your time and your well-being? If so, I'll invite you to check out my website, financialwellnesscoach.ca.