

KEYSTONES OF MENTAL HEALTH

Unlock the Power Of Emotions

The prevalence of mental illness in our society is significant, and the chances are high that you or someone in your family or your company, or simply an acquaintance in your rural community is struggling with his or her mental health. According to the National Institutes of Health, anxiety disorders, including panic, social anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, various phobias and general anxiety affect about 19% of the population, while depression affects another 7%. Thus, more than a quarter of the U.S. population experiences a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year.

In his 2020 book “Permission to Feel,” author Marc Brackett, Ph.D., suggests that a significant contributor to our society’s mental health challenges is our inability to understand and regulate our emotions. “If we can learn to identify, express, and harness our feelings, even the most challenging ones,” he writes, “we can use those emotions to help us create positive, satisfying lives.”

Brackett uses the acronym RULER to help us recall how to deal with our emotions. Here is a summary of each step in his process.

RECOGNIZE OUR EMOTIONS

The first step is simply noticing a change in your emotional state. You might detect a shift in your own thoughts, energy or mood, or in someone else’s facial expression or voice. When you pay attention, you notice that something is “going on” with yourself or another person.

UNDERSTAND OUR EMOTIONS

The second step is to understand the reason for the emotion. In my case, I’ve found that everything from the time of day, the weather, the length of my to-do list or my latest interaction with someone can change how I’m feeling. In communicating with others, the ability to pinpoint the reason someone is experiencing an emotion vastly improves your communication with them.

LABEL OUR EMOTIONS

When it comes to naming my own emotions, I’m remarkably lacking in creativity, often vacillating between the words “great” and “OK” and “frustrated.” A quick internet search, however, suggests there are more than 3,000 words for our feelings. After reading Brackett’s book, I downloaded the “How We Feel” app (you can find it at howwefeel.org) to improve my ability to name, and thereby pay more attention to, my emotions. The app lists 144 words to describe our feelings and connects those feelings to other events, the weather, sleep and physical activity to detect trends in one’s emotional state.

EXPRESS OUR EMOTIONS

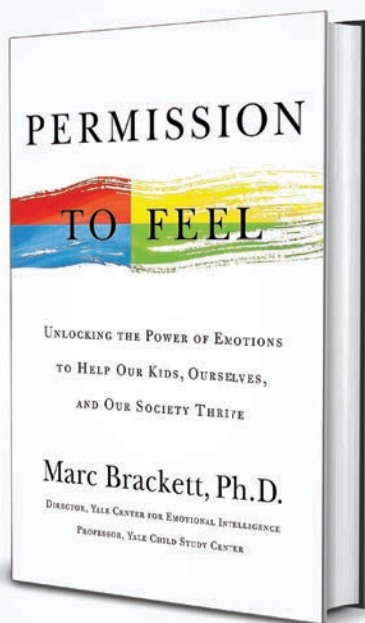
Expressing how you feel doesn’t mean you have to share all of your feelings with everyone you meet. Rather, having a sense of how and when to display your emotions, and knowing the appropriateness and the “unspoken rules” (also called “display rules”) of your audience and the setting are key.

REGULATE OUR EMOTIONS

Managing one’s emotions isn’t the typical kind of hard work you are used to on a family farm or ranch, but always being on top of your emotional state can wear you down, particularly when there is a gap between how you feel and how you present yourself to others. Regulating strategies can include focused breathing, performing rituals to prepare for emotionally taxing circumstances, shifting your

attention away from certain feelings, reframing how you see a situation and pausing to take a third-person view of your current state.

Brackett points out that “our cognitive abilities—what we focus on, where we devote our efforts, what we remember, how we make decisions, our levels of creativity and engagement—all depend on our emotional state.” Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating our emotions can not only improve our mental health but also improve our relationships, our physical health and our performance in our family businesses. ///



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