



Exercise: The Functions of Emotions

Emotions – even those that feel unpleasant or seem negative – can serve several important functions:

1. Emotions **motivate** actions that are essential to our survival (e.g., a fight, flight or freeze response).
2. Emotions **communicate** to those in our environment that we are dealing with stressors and that we need support.
3. Emotions serve a **self-validating** function (i.e., they tell us that something important in our life is changing or is affected, and help us learn how to deal with recurrent stressors over time).

People may find that they are less effective at work when they ignore their emotions. They may gain important information from examining exactly what an emotional response may be communicating to them. A manager, for example, may be surprised to find herself reacting angrily when invited to a special event. Upon further reflection, she may realize that the anger reaction is telling her she is overcommitted and should reconsider her work/life balance, at least temporarily.

Think of a time you were angry at work and it served you well. What function(s) did this emotion serve for you? How? (Be specific.)

Situation: _____

Function(s) the anger served: _____

Think of a time you were fearful at work and it served you well. What function(s) did this emotion serve for you? How? (Be specific.)

Situation: _____

Function(s) the fear served: _____

Think of a time you were sad (or hurt) at work and it served you well. What function(s) did this emotion serve for you? How? (Be specific.)

Situation: _____

Function(s) the sadness (or hurt) served: _____
