



Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions – 2017 Update

by Melissa Donaldson | Apr 27, 2017 | EQ Business, EQ Life | 11 comments

If you want to enhance your emotional literacy, Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions is a useful tool.

To practice emotional intelligence effectively, you need to have a robust and nuanced emotional vocabulary. Here at Six Seconds, we call it [enhancing emotional literacy](#). It's the foundation for essential EQ skills like recognizing, labeling, and navigating emotions. But how can go about increasing our emotional vocabulary? Robert Plutchik's wheel of emotions is a great place to start – and we included an interpretation guide below!

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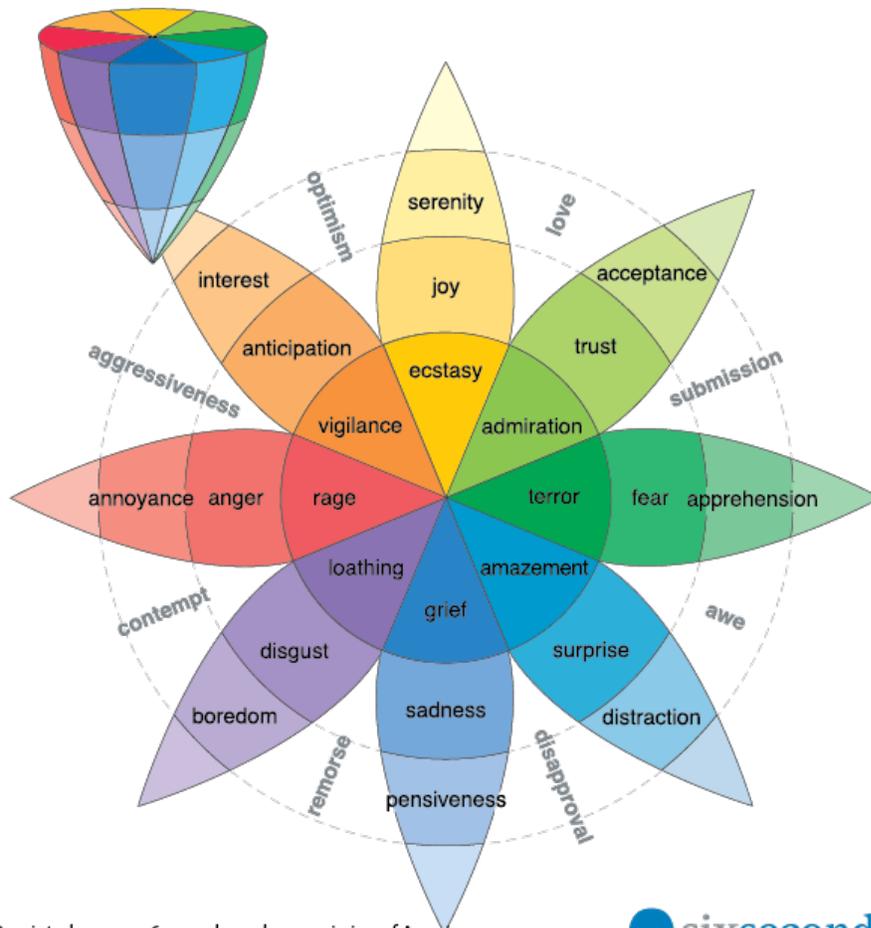
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As explained in Josh Freedman's bestselling book "At the Heart of Leadership," Robert Plutchik's three-dimensional model describes the relations among emotions, which is extremely helpful in understanding how complex emotions interact and change over time. So, what do all those colors and petals mean?

Get a free worksheet on the 8 basic emotions and the purpose each serves

Breaking Down Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions

Primary: The eight sectors are designed to indicate that there are eight primary emotion dimensions. They are anger, anticipation, joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness and disgust.

Intensity: The cone's vertical dimension represents intensity – emotions intensify as they move from the outside to the center of the wheel. For

example, a feeling of boredom can intensify to loathing if left unchecked. This is an important rule about emotions to be aware of in relationships: ***If left unchecked, emotions can intensify.*** Herein lies the wisdom of enhancing your emotional vocabulary: it's the bedrock of effectively [navigating emotions](#).

Building your emotional vocabulary makes navigating emotions a whole lot easier.

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Relations: Each circle sector has an opposite emotion. The opposite of sadness is joy, and the opposite of trust is disgust. Can you find the opposite of anticipation? ...

That makes a lot of sense, huh?

The emotions with no color represent an emotion that is a mix of the 2 primary emotions. For example, anticipation and joy combine to be optimism. Joy and trust combine to be love. Emotions are often complex, and being able to recognize when a feeling is actually a combination of two or more distinct feelings is a helpful skill. That is a basic guide for interpreting the emotion wheel created by psychologist Robert Plutchik.

What Does It Mean to Be Emotionally Literate?

Plutchik's emotion wheel helps us look at literacy through a broader lens. Literacy means "a person's knowledge of a particular subject or field." So enhancing emotional literacy means not only having words for emotions, but understanding how different emotions are related to one another and how they tend to change over time.

You can read Robert Plutchik's original explanation of his model of emotions in [American Scientist](#).

Want to be fluent in the language of emotions? This is a good place

to start.

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If you want to be part of a team of world-wide practitioners helping each other use emotions to live more meaningful, intentional lives, come be part of our [global EQ network](#).



Speaking of the global EQ network, the inspiration for writing this article came as a result of the amazing opportunity I had to sit in on the Science of the Mind Forum at the “Happiness and its Causes” conference in Brisbane, Australia last week. During the conference I observed a dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama (HHDL), Paul Ekman (international expert in reading clues embedded in the face, body and voice), Professor Marco Iacoboni (who pioneered the research on mirror neurons) and Professor Patrick McGorry (world-renowned expert in the prevention and treatment of youth mental illness). What struck me about this dialogue was the instantaneous connection between these 4 people and then their intense curiosity to share with and to learn from each other about emotions such as anger, compassion and empathy.

My 3 key takeaways from the dialogue were:

1. Most of the emotion that disturbs our mind has incorrect perception as its basis – there is a gap between appearance and reality
2. The antidote to wrong perception is compassion – to have genuine care and concern for the other person because it is from this place that we close the gap between what we think we see and what is really happening

3. We are wired for empathy and His Holiness now knows what mirror neurons are!!

The remainder of the conference was spent interacting with the conference delegates (over 2000 attending the conference) at the Six Seconds stall. We discussed the power of the Six Seconds' Model, the rules of emotions (there was a lot interest in the Plutchik model) and heard some wonderfully inspiring stories about the generosity of the people of Queensland and Brisbane during the January floods. I continue to replay the many inspirational conversations and stories I heard. To those of you who came to visit us, thank you for your questions, stories and interest in Emotional Intelligence.

I'd be keen to hear other ways you've used the Plutchik model or how you could use it with your clients.

Fill in this form to get the worksheet on the meaning of the eight basic emotions:

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Melissa Donaldson

For the past 15 years, I've partnered with senior executives and leaders in public and private sector organisations to execute significant change, design and implement leadership capability programs, renegotiate complex industrial agreements and build leader and team performance.

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11 Comments

Kylie on

Reply

November 15, 2011 at 1:36 am

I am an artist who has recently discovered Plutchik's theory as I am beginning on a body of work exploring emotions. His theory is resonating with my thoughts and I am using each of his basic emotions as a starting point for each of the major works. I am struggling with how I will represent anticipation in

body language and expressive line
though... it's just not as easy to tap into
as anger or joy!



Todd on April 13, 2015 at 3:41 pm

So, those emotions that “disturb the mind” while rich in information, are sending the wrong message. Best to pause and allow “the wiring” to engage so we close the gap lest the intensity escalate.

Sounds like the basis for most conflicts and why they often escalate.

[Reply](#)



Leckey Harrison on August 4, 2015 at 10:43 am

I teach people how to release stress and trauma, and often there are emotional releases. One aspect I experience is the emotions relative to states of fight, flight, and freeze.

In my research over the years, I have learned about the vast array of nerves in the viscera, and correlated that with Candace Pert's work. I am also aware of William James's work on the correlations, and he postulated that we feel because we move, as Dr. Levine explained in his book, “In an Unspoken Voice.”

I want to explore more of this aspect, as it is rich, and how the intensity that alters these emotions is generated. I know where I experience intensity, and was wondering if they are different or not.

I happen to have Josh's book on my Kindle!

[Reply](#)



Femi-Coach on June 2, 2016 at 10:59 am

I really like this emotions model, it makes us conscious about ourselves. The greatest thing is to understand the way we think, and why we think this or other way. I wish every body to live the way they want, being conscious and happy!:)

[Reply](#)



Susanne on June 6, 2016 at 4:00 pm

Great article. The more we understand our emotions and their relevance the easier it is to ask ourselves "is this just my wrong thinking?".As leaders it is paramount that we understand our people and ourselves.

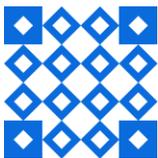
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Carol Murch on October 16, 2016 at 7:21 pm

This information on Plutchik's model is new to me. I plan to do more research on it. I'm also interested in learning more about Professor McGorry. I work in a unit of a juvenile probation department that specializes in working with youth who have mental health diagnoses. Thank you for sharing this article.

[Reply](#)



George D. Bond, II on October 21, 2016 at 6:16 pm

I would like permission to use this as a potential newsletter article in the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Thank you

[Reply](#)



Judy Nelson on April 28, 2017 at 8:10 am

Excellent article! Is there a physical

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object that is the Model of Emotions? I would like to purchase!



Joshua Freedman on September 14, 2017 at 5:04 pm

Reply

Love that idea Judy!



Chad Jennings on September 13, 2017 at 8:47 am

Reply

The link to the American Scientist article seems to be broken. Can you update it please?



Joshua Freedman on September 14, 2017 at 5:06 pm

Reply

Thanks Chad – was not easy to find... but here's a link:
<http://74.217.243.210/issues/feature/2001/4/the-nature-of-emotions> (and I corrected in the article). If you don't have journal access, I also found that searching "american scientist nature emotions plutchik" that some people have a PDF of the article online...

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emotion, asserted at a recent neuroscience convention, "It is not anger which is the...

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