

THE GO-GETTER THRIVE GUIDE

To Act or Accept?

by Recalibrate



TOP OF MIND

from Gloria Chan Packer | Recalibrate

I increasingly feel like I might lose my mind if I hear an ad say “unprecedented” or “uncertain” one more time. I cringe because it feels bandwagon-y and not genuine -- but also because it's true -- and maybe too true for me to want to be reminded of every second. With that in mind, we're not here to drag you through more fear-magnifying or bright-siding of our world's current circumstance. Rather, we're sharing insights on how to navigate the antsy, complex, and heavy moments of unpredictability by asking ourselves, “To Act or Accept?”

Common ingredients found in unpredictability casseroles are feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and general “Auughh how much longer of this?” It can be detrimental to our mental wellness to feel like we can't help ourselves out of an unpleasant situation because our brains naturally like to feel the opposite of helplessness. Our brains want to feel like we have agency and empowerment over being able to resource ourselves to survive, thrive, and evolve in life. For a myriad of reasons, a lot of us are struggling to feel such agency and empowerment right now. It feels difficult to envision a clear answer or action to the complexities swirling about the election, pandemic, holidays, and work changes. Not having an answer, in a world that constantly tries to convince us that we can and should have the immediate answer to everything, can make us feel pret-ty darn squirmy. (E.g. I may or may not be compensating for said squirmy feelings by seeking control via the obsessive arranging of our home's



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books, sitting alone upstairs, sorting and re-sorting books into stacks of genre, author, size, even Googling the Dewey Decimal System. Yikes.)

WELL. In the name of tuning into, navigating, and providing care for our squirmy feelings -- Dewey Decimal System nuttiness or not -- this issue's theme is “To Act or Accept?”, offering a reminder to listen to our angst and care for ourselves. Our hope is that we can each, on our own timelines and in our own ways -- wayfind back to a sense of agency and empowerment, despite how many “unprecedented” and “uncertainty” grenades we face in the future.

Ahead, you'll read powerfully insightful wisdom on acting vs accepting in our Expert Forecast with Danielle Locklear, LMFT, who provides culturally-inclusive and trauma-informed counseling services in Austin, TX. Then, in the name of accepting all emotions, we're examining the blanket definition of “emotions” in Emotional Vocabulary. Lastly, we'll close with a journaling prompt to start tuning into, acting on, or accepting those beautiful emotions of yours. ■

EXPERT FORECAST

Interview with Danielle Locklear, LMFT

Our team interviewed an experienced leader in both psychotherapy and activism to share insights with y'all on how to work through the hard moments we're all living, searching for action or acceptance to navigate.

We are incredibly grateful to have gotten to sit down with Danielle Locklear, a therapist and practice owner who provides culturally-inclusive and trauma-informed counseling in Austin. Below, Danielle shares powerful, insightful, and nourishing advice that let our minds breathe and hearts feel. We hope you find the same.

RECALIBRATE: Our theme this issue, "To Act or Accept?" is focused on noticing and processing the weird or hard emotions we're all stumbling upon. What are your "pro tips" here?

DANIELLE: The number one tool I offer my clients, that I'll offer now, is to pause and ask yourself "What if it were OK to feel this way right now? What would change about my experience of this moment?" because then: (1) we're no longer storytelling that we're being too dramatic or that we need to toughen up, and (2) we're also not disconnecting from ourselves by saying "It's fine; I'll get over it" because clearly, it's not fine. When we do that and say "It's fine", that just puts distance between ourselves and our experience and we can't truly be mindful, navigate, or discern from that place.

One other thing I want to highlight is that in times of increased emotionality or stress, we tend to go into really black-and-white thinking of "It's either this or this" and when we do that, we don't really allow space for other possibilities or multiple possibilities to exist at once. A lot of aspects of life are not mutually exclusive. For example, you can feel stuck at your job AND seeking support from your current leadership AND actively connecting to your sense of agency exploring new opportunities. All of that can exist at once. **When we're feeling a lot of feelings, we tend to shy away from "bad" feelings but I believe there are no bad feelings. Why make an uncomfortable emotion harder by saying it shouldn't be there?**



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RECALIBRATE: Are there ways you think people often overlook or misinterpret ways to take action or find acceptance for feelings? For example, we find that people often don't see rest as an important form of action because our society is so obsessed with productivity.

DANIELLE: What it often boils down to is asking ourselves, "What narratives have I internalized that I'm reinforcing on my own?" We live in a capitalist, productivity-driven society and whether we ascribe to that or not, it is reinforced to us by advertising, our employers, and even ourselves when we are our own bosses! So, finding moments to ask "What am I telling myself, even when nobody is explicitly telling me so? Where did I first learn this? Has this ever been modeled for me?"

Healthy forms of rest haven't been modeled for many people. Instead, we see someone who totally overworks themselves, is completely depleted, and then vegs out and binges Netflix for three days. That's not rest; that's being exhausted and completely depleted. Even if we have the time available to us to rest, if we haven't internally given ourselves the permission to rest, we won't rest. We'll go through the motions but not feel restored because our minds are racing about the dishes or deadlines so it's like yeah, you laid down to rest, but your nervous system didn't actually rest. Most of us don't know how to rest because rest has been so societally attached to laziness and devaluation.

RECALIBRATE: We see this often with our clients, who are hard-working, high-achievers. It reminds me of a question I got after a recent workplace workshop, where someone asked how they could tell if their fatigue was due to laziness or actually needing rest, and it kind of broke my heart and was so relatable because so many of us have internalized that rest means we're weak or lesser.

DANIELLE: Yeah, I think your body tells you a lot and most of us aren't super attuned to our bodies anymore. We're kind of socialized away from that in a lot of ways but your body generally knows a lot and I'm a firm believer that your body gets louder the longer you ignore it.

RECALIBRATE: Burnout is something that often creeps up because we're not attuned to our bodies. When it comes to the emotionally-charged work a lot of us are feeling like we need to take on right now – whether related to the pandemic, social justice, or the election -- is there anything you recommend practicing to help avoid burnout?

DANIELLE: I think it's a lot of different things and one major factor is your identity. If you are somebody who identifies as Black, you're not going to be able to engage in Black Lives Matter constantly because there's a level of engagement in that topic that causes harm and is traumatizing. **There's not a cookie-cutter approach. Everyone is different based on their own history, and you are different in different seasons of life and hours of the day. A lot of us are trying to hold ourselves to this old standard that just doesn't work anymore. You're not the person you were before this pandemic. You can't be. You can't have the same output, the same bandwidth, because at some level, your nervous system and your body are adapting to and accepting that we are in the midst of a global trauma. Everything is weird. Going to the grocery store is weird. Everything is weird. And that takes some level of bandwidth, on a silent level, whether you realize it or not.**



You cannot show up the same way you did because nobody can. Part of this is also body attunement and giving yourself internal permission. Part of this is re-adjusting your expectations for yourself. I like to use the word “availability” to really determine what you're available for when. For example, I lead a lot of workshops on racial trauma, but I'm not going to engage on the topic of racial trauma all the time because that is draining of my energy and I need to allow for boundaries and safe space to rest so I can continue to do the work. *(At this point, Danielle pauses, reflecting and then elaborating on her words “so I can continue to do the work”)* I think in a lot of these activist circles, we see people being a martyr to the cause, which I don't think is a viable or sustainable model.

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We say “You’ve got to take a break so you can get back to doing the work” -- but also -- you’ve got to take a break because you are a human that is worthy of rest. The work will happen when it happens but also, we are worthy of attuning to ourselves and restoring ourselves at a basic human level, whether there’s a cause to fight for or not.

Also, I think we need to acknowledge there are no quick fixes to the election or COVID. The election and COVID are exposing systemic inequities and toxicity that have always been there and it’s not going to be an overnight fix.

Regardless of how the election goes, there is a lot of work to be done. For the civil rights movement, there’s a lot of work to be done. I think we need to ask ourselves “What does my involvement look like from a sustainability standpoint?” because this is a marathon and not a sprint.

RECALIBRATE: Wow. So much power in that. Going back to your note on martyrdom and your earlier note on examining what we internalize and reinforce -- one thing my brain is jumping to is wondering what we internalize about martyrdom because I think in a lot of portrayals of activism, we see martyrdom kind of glamorized or maybe portrayed as a standard to strive for -- and I wonder how many have internalized that.



DANIELLE: Yeah, I work with a lot of activists and lead workshops for activists and there is that guilt when they take a break. I don’t want to make a sweeping generalization but it happens enough to where I can say that it’s common. It’s that “There’s so much work to be done and who’s going to do it if I’m not?” but there’s always going to be work to be done. This goes back to asking, can multiple things exist at the same time? Can there be work that needs to be done? AND, can I take time for myself to restore?

RECALIBRATE: In these especially emotionally difficult situations -- especially when people feel stuck in the middle of not feeling like they can take action to change a circumstance while also being in a situation that’s too painful to accept -- what advice would you offer?

DANIELLE: When we talk about emotionally difficult situations, it reminds me of grief. Grief is a very painful process and is also a very necessary process. I think we are in a moment of collective grief as a species, as a nation, and also as smaller pockets of community. We all want to feel “better” faster, but sometimes, we can’t rush these emotional experiences. I’d say if you’re experiencing hopelessness, rage, anger, fear -- that a lot of those things are actually going to be really healthy responses to trauma. If we could just start normalizing that and letting those emotions run their course because emotions are waves. They’re meant to come through us, but when we try to stop them, then we carry them with us.

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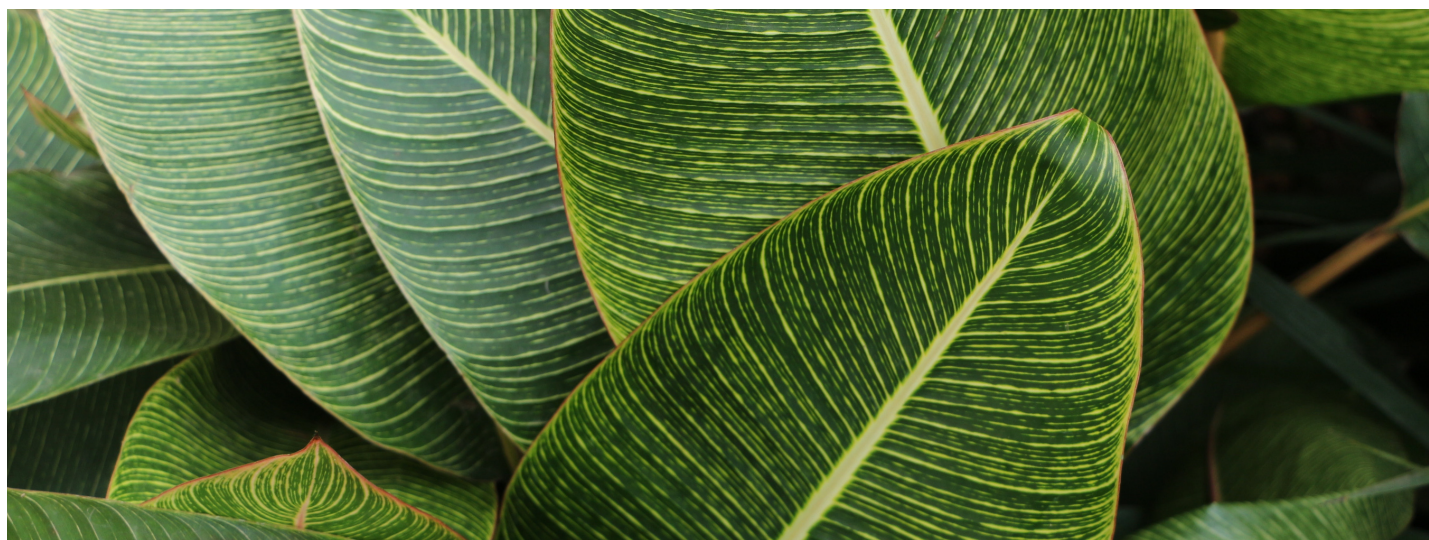
Especially because COVID and the election brings a looming uncertainty, and a lot of us are facing this definition of living that we haven't experienced before, I'd recommend making actions as small as possible. It might be asking: Have I had water? Have I eaten? What can I do now in this moment? Or maybe just re-centering with breath. Making it the smallest, most manageable act because sometimes, we're in situations we can't control but we always have a say in how we navigate them. That's not intended to be bright-siding either. You can recognize that a situation you're in is awful but you can still connect to your ability to navigate it.

RECALIBRATE: Wow. Thank you. Is there any other wisdom or encouragement you'd like to share with our readers?

DANIELLE: There's a quote, I think from the poet Nayyira Waheed that is "If you need more time to know how you feel about a thing, take more time to know how you feel about a thing." It's so simple and it's this deep reminder that we're all trying to rush and we all want instant gratification -- but we need patience as we're all adapting. We've been constantly adapting since February, we're continuing to adapt, and there's a level of needing time to figure things out because a lot of us are figuring these things out for the first time. Anchor in doing the "good enough" job -- making the good enough choice, being the good enough employee, partner, sibling, parent -- because I call that a win. If you are maintaining, I call that a win. I don't expect anyone to be thriving right now. And I think that patience allows for us to be good enough. ■



A native Austinite, Danielle founded her private practice in 2017 with the intention to bring the human connection back into the therapy space through culturally inclusive and trauma informed counseling services to some of Austin's most underrepresented populations. Her practice offers an approach that integrates mindfulness, somatic work and self-compassion, with a particular interest in the trauma of systemic oppression, cultural identity and intergenerational trauma. In addition to her therapy work with individuals, couples and families, Danielle is also a storyteller and group educator. To learn more, visit daniellelocklearcounseling.com or follow her on Instagram @[dlcounselingatx](https://www.instagram.com/dlcounselingatx)



EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

We loved the reminder Danielle gave us that all feelings are there to be felt. There are no “bad” or “good” feelings. So rather than choose one emotion to define this issue, we thought we’d go back to basics and just define what emotions, in general, are.

EMOTION | *noun* /ə'mōSH(ə)n/

Literary definition: A natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others¹.

Scientific definition: Emotions are psychophysiological reactions² to prompt an organism³ to take an action as a survival mechanism to meet a survival need.⁴

Layman's Terms definition: Our emotions are our nervous systems trying to alert us.

A familiar example of this? Being hangry. You haven't eaten for a while, your nervous system senses an urgent need for food, and so it prompts an emotional response. Physically, your heart rate increases, body tenses, and tummy rumbles. Psychologically, you are irritable, short, and can't focus. You are hangry. Your nervous system sensed a need, and emotion was a tool it used to get you to address that need.

"What if instead, we learned to practice more advanced awareness, understanding, and attunement to our emotions?"

When we ignore an emotion, our nervous system senses that we're not getting an important message. If the message is related to a perceived stress and we ignore it, our nervous system gets even more agitated and tries to get our attention by ringing more psychophysiological alarm bells: a faster heart rate, a tighter chest, a shorter temper.⁵ If we keep ignoring the emotion, the alarm bells get louder and more frequent until our nervous system gives us no choice but to pay attention. Cue: a bottled-up emotional explosion.

The bottled-up emotional explosion happens to us all and is understandable — but is NOT the only choice for how we can experience emotions. What if instead, we learned to practice more advanced awareness, understanding, and attunement to our emotions? That way, we could respond in real-time, rather than burying our heads in the sand until a bottled-up explosion blindsides us. Check out our Mental Love Tap below for ways to start tuning back into yourself. ■



- [1] “Emotion.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion>. Accessed 21 Oct. 2020.
- [2] Scarantino, Andrea and de Sousa, Ronald, “Emotion”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/emotion>
- [3] Solomon, Robert C. “Emotions”, Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., March 2019. Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <https://www.britannica.com/science/emotion>.
- [4] “Emotion.” ScienceDaily, March 2020. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/emotion.htm>
- [5] Van der Kolk, Bessel A, M.D. The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. New York: Viking, 2014.

MENTAL LOVE TAP

One of the most important things we can do for our mental health is to practice awareness and care for our emotions, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Remember that every emotion is information that your nervous system is trying to prompt. Consider acting like a detective, asking questions to understand the emotion, without bias or predisposition. Here are some journaling or reflection questions you can practice:

1. What am I feeling? Is there one word or phrase that comes to mind? What do I feel in my body? What do my breath, heart rate, and muscles feel like? Is my body more tense or relaxed?
2. What might this feeling be trying to tell me? Is this feeling old, new, or both? Where might I have adapted this from? Maybe a past experience? Why might it be coming up now?
3. How can I care for this feeling? How can I acknowledge it — like I would toward a friend or a loved one? How can I comfort it — without minimizing, distracting, or invalidating? Does the feeling need something? Acknowledgement, comfort, or an action to be taken?



Remember that building emotional self-awareness takes effort and practice. Most of us didn't grow up with such education, so if this feels difficult or weird to practice at first, be patient and compassionate with yourself. Take baby steps; you don't have to eat the apple in one bite. ■

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