

Beware Of Hurt Feelings¹

Arnie Dahlke
(June 30, 2014)



One of the biggest challenges for people in any workplace is overcoming defensive reactions to things that other people do. I've lost count of the number of times that people tell me about how someone else has hurt their feelings.

The fact is, no one ever hurts your feelings. Only *you* hurt your feelings.

"What?" you say. "What are you talking about? Haven't you ever had anybody hurt your feelings?"

Nope. At least not since I realized that *only I can hurt my feelings*. Let me explain with an example.

One day, I was talking to an Administrative Assistant who seemed very upset. I asked her if I could help her and she answered, "Oh, I guess I'll get over it—my supervisor really hurt me when he said that!"

I asked "Where?"

She looked confused for a moment and then asked, "What do you mean?"

"Where did he hurt you?" I asked. "In your arm, your leg, your head? Where did he hurt you?"

She paused for a moment and then said, "Well, my feelings—he hurt my feelings."

"My God!" I exclaimed. "Should I call 911? Do we need a surgeon?"

She started smiling a little and said, "Come on, you know what I mean! He *hurt* me!"

"No, I don't know what you mean," I said. "You said he hurt your feelings. Tell me where your feelings are located. Maybe we can grab a hold of them and do something with them to make you feel better."

She frowned at me and ignored my request, saying, "He made me feel like I'm dumb or stupid!"

"Are you angry?" I asked.

She thought for a moment. "Yes... I guess I am angry."



"Why?" I asked.

"Because I'm *not* dumb or stupid!" she exclaimed.

"Well there you have it!" I said. "It isn't that he hurt you or that your feelings are hurt. The truth is, you're feeling *angry* because he thinks about you in a way you don't want to be thought of."

"Well... you're right. He made me feel angry," she said.

"Did he twist your arm?" I asked. "Did he hold you down and pour anger into you?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she said. "He made me mad!"

"No," I said, "*he* didn't make you feel anything. He didn't hurt you. He didn't hurt your feelings. He simply said something and **YOU** got angry. **YOU'RE** the one who decided to get angry. Now, what are **YOU** going to do about it?"

"Wait a minute!" she exclaimed. "Are you saying you never feel angry or hurt when someone says or does something to you?"



¹ Excerpted and modified from Chapter Seven of *Me, You, And The Power Of Choice* by Arnie Dahlke: (<http://www.arniedahlke.com/meyou.htm>)
Meanwhile, take a moment to explore some of my other Timely Tips: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

“Well, first of all,” I replied, I’m *not* saying you or I will never feel anything. What I *am* saying is that WE are the people *doing* the feeling—no one else put that feeling inside of us—it’s OUR feeling. No one ever does something TO you or me —unless it’s a physical act of some sort—they just *do something*. We then choose how we will react.

“So what?” she declared. “I’m feeling it and he caused it.”

“Not exactly,” I answered. “What he said to you *stimulated* you to feel angry. Why? Because he said something to you that YOU think puts you in a bad light. YOU’RE still the one doing the thinking and feeling.”

“Well that’s like splitting hairs,” she said. “What’s the point of all of this?”



“The point is *not* that you won’t ever feel anything when someone says or does something,” I answered. “The point *is*, once you feel what you feel, *only you* can do anything about it. *You own it.*”

“*Only you,*” I explained, “can choose to continue feeling it or decide that feeling angry is a waste of your energy because he doesn’t know what he’s talking about or because you simply can’t expect anything better from him.”

“Well this is all good theory,” she said. “It sounds nice on paper. But how does one go about making that choice?”

“It’s not easy,” I answered. “And it takes time to learn. You will have to consciously practice a different way of looking at things than you do now.”

- ◆ “The first thing to do,” I continued, “is **truly accept—truly believe—that you and only you are responsible for every single one of your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions.** Once you accept this belief, it is easy to realize that *only you* can change your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions.”
- ◆ “The second thing to do,” I went on, “is to **objectively evaluate the information you’ve received from the other person through his words or actions.** For example, if he criticized you for something you did wrong, ask yourself if you really *did* do it wrong. If you did, then turn it into a problem to be solved. Figure out how you can do it the *right* way in the future. In other words, turn your angry or hurt energy into a positive, problem-solving energy. If you did *not* do it wrong, hold your ground—gather your facts together—show him how you *did* do it right. If he still doesn’t think you’ve done it right, ask him for his help. Ask him to show you how he thinks it should be done. In this way, you open a problem-solving discourse.”
- ◆ “Third, and this is very important,” I continued, “given your past experiences with this person, **stop to consider what you can realistically expect from him.** Given who he is and given the situation, do you expect anything different from him? If your answer is ‘Yes,’ that you do expect less critical behavior because he normally doesn’t behave that way, then turn it into a problem that both of you must solve together. Find out what’s going on with him. He may be hurting and needing help and support. On the other hand, if your answer is ‘No’ because this is always the way he deals with people, then why on earth feel angry? It’s just him doing what he always does!”



“In the end,” I continued, “we all want to live happy lives with as little stress as possible. The more time we spend drowning in negative emotions, the more energy we spiral into unhappiness, and the more we will feel stressed.”

Pausing for a moment, I concluded, “The responsibility to change all of this is ours alone—*it’s all in our own hands.*”

She looked at me, thought for a moment, and then smiled and said, “Well, I guess that *does* make sense. I’ll give it a try next time someone says something I think is hurtful. I will change my expectations and put my energy into *me.*”

