



A Book That Changed My Approach to Problem Solving

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Hey ,

Quick thing before we start - my team and I are exploring the idea of running some in-person workshops for entrepreneurs/creators in major cities around the world. If you're a creator / entrepreneur / business owner etc doing \$100k+ in revenue and you might be interested in joining the workshops/events, [please could you fill out this form](#) so we can gauge interest and figure out which cities to hit up first 😊

Anyway, my bedtime reading these days has been a book titled [Already Free](#) by Bruce Tift, a psychotherapist who's also been a practising Buddhist for 40+ years. He writes about blending two different approaches to dealing with the stuff we struggle with.

From my understanding of it, approach #1 is the traditionally Western approach to therapy, and also I guess to problems in general: figure out why the problem is happening, and improve yourself and your circumstances to solve the problem. Tift calls this the “developmental” approach.

But then there's the more Buddhist perspective which (again, to my understanding) says: “Hey so you know that thing you think is a problem... really it's just an experience or a feeling... and if you were able to fully welcome the experience and the feeling, you'd realise you're not actually harmed by it, and then you'll realise that you don't *need* to change anything about yourself or your circumstances, and that you're already free haha lol”. Or something like that. Tift calls this the “fruitful” perspective.

In his own psychotherapy practice, Tift writes about how he blends these two different approaches to “problems”, depending on what the client

needs and would benefit from in the specific situation.

“By contrast to the developmental or Western view, which focuses on releasing old strategies in order to achieve the freedom we seek at some point in the future, the fruitional view takes the position that we’re already free. Nothing needs to change for us to feel complete and at peace except our own perception of reality.”

My understanding of this (okay I’ll stop hedging now) is that one approach is the “improvement” approach, and the other is the “acceptance” approach.

For example, let’s take an issue that’s been plaguing me for years: The problem I have when I’m supposed to be filming a YouTube video, but I don’t feel like doing it.

(I know - please get your tiny violin out and lament how difficult my life is that I sometimes don’t feel like making a silly internet video)

The developmental approach would be: “Okay, let’s figure out *why* you don’t feel like it. What’s the root cause? What childhood trauma is this connected to? How can we fix this so you always feel motivated?”

But the fruitional approach says something completely different: “What if you’re never going to feel like filming videos? What if that feeling of resistance is just always going to be there? What would change about how you approach this if you accepted that?”

And there’s something weirdly liberating about that.

Because here’s the thing - every single YouTuber I’ve ever met struggles with filming videos, even though that’s literally our job. It’s a pipe dream to think I’ll reliably feel like doing it twice a week forever. So if I can just accept that the feeling of not wanting to do it is often going to be there, and that the feeling is just an internal bodily sensation... suddenly there’s no problem.

Whether I'm "feeling like it" or "not feeling like it" - either way, it's just a feeling, a set of internal bodily sensations accompanied by some sort of thought or story. The feeling doesn't have to impact my actions. Whether I feel motivated or not doesn't actually need to affect whether I do the thing.

As I write this, I realise this sounds suspiciously like the whole "discipline" thing: "Just do the thing even if you don't feel like doing it".

I've long been opposed to the discipline thing... but maybe I was throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

The flavour of "discipline" that I've never vibed with is the flavour that says: "grit your teeth and PUSH through the feeling of not wanting to do the thing, stop being a pussy and just DO IT" .

This more Buddhist-inspired flavour of discipline feels more like: "Oh interesting, I'm noticing I don't feel like doing this thing right now. That's totally fine and normal - this feeling will probably come up again. I can just let the feeling be here while I do the thing anyway".

Even though this is still "discipline", there's something about it that feels much nicer than the "push through" approach. It's the difference between fighting the feeling and making friends with it. One feels like going to war with myself, the other feels like... I dunno, maybe acknowledging that there's some pneumatic drill construction noise happening in the flat downstairs while I get on with my work. The noise is there, I can't really do much about it, but it doesn't have to stop me from doing what I need to do.

I think the key difference is that the harsh discipline approach treats the feeling like an enemy that needs to be defeated. But this other approach treats the feeling like... just weather. Sometimes it's raining, sometimes it's sunny. You don't get angry at the rain for existing, you don't need to treat it like an enemy that must be vanquished. You just pack your umbrella, keep calm and carry on good chap.

What's interesting over the past few weeks is that when I stop trying to

“solve” the feeling of not wanting to film, and just accept it as part of the human experience of being a YouTuber, there’s actually less resistance. It’s like the feeling relaxes when it’s not being actively fought against.

And from that place of “relaxing” into the feeling of “not feeling like it”, I’ve got more space to think: “Okay so even though I don’t feel like it, I’m still going to film this video... so now that I’ve decided that, how might I film it in a way that feels enjoyable”.

Tift talks about this with anxiety too. He writes that we’ve created this weird fiction in Western society that life should be free of anxiety. So when we feel anxious, we immediately attach it to something specific: “I’m anxious because of X. If I can just solve X, I’ll never feel anxious again.”

But that creates this exhausting cycle where we’re either desperately trying to solve X, or we don’t solve X and still feel anxious all the time. His point is that humans just... feel anxiety sometimes. It’s part of the package deal of having a nervous system. But by thinking it’s possible to live anxiety-free, we actually end up feeling more anxious, not less.

Tift isn’t saying that we should just accept everything and never try to improve anything. But he does point out that maybe some of the stuff we think are problems aren’t actually problems - they’re just experiences. And maybe some of our suffering comes from thinking these normal human experiences shouldn’t be happening to us.

It’s like we’ve been sold this idea (by those goddamn influencers) that the right productivity system, or the right mindset, or the right life setup will make us feel good all the time. But what if trying to feel good all the time is a recipe for dissatisfaction? What if we’d be way more content by just being okay with feeling however we feel?

Nah that can’t be true - I’m sure I’ll feel more contentment by finding a better productivity app.

Have a great week!

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