



# Human Optimization

## Pod Club Discussion Questions



### E17 Finding Balance in Emotions: Regulating Your Emotional Flexibility and Rigidity

Guest: Chris Stephenson, M.D., M.H.P.E., M.S., Internal Medicine Physician, General Internal Medicine, Vice Chair of Practice | Mayo Clinic – Rochester, MN

*The three big questions explored in the podcast:*

#### Question 1

What is the concept of emotional flexibility vs. rigidity, and why is it essential for success?

#### Question 2

Do I actually have big feelings that I need to address? If so, why can't they just stay buried?

#### Question 3

What steps can I take to become more emotionally flexible?

### Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Stephenson defines emotional flexibility as the ability to regulate and respond to emotions based on context, values, and goals. Think about a recent situation where you felt emotionally rigid. How might emotional flexibility have changed the outcome?
2. Consider three healthy strategies for emotional regulation discussed in this episode: 1) acceptance, 2) reflectivity, and 3) reframing. Which of these strategies do you find most challenging to implement? What is one small thing you can do to improve or consistently practice that strategy?
3. Three maladaptive strategies discussed in this episode include 1) ruminating, 2) minimizing/ignoring, and 3) rigid thinking. Which of these do you notice yourself doing when dealing with difficult emotions? How might you begin to redirect your thinking in these moments?
4. Dr. Stephenson introduces the concept of "top-down" (cognitive) and "bottom-up" (physiological) strategies for managing emotional triggers. Consider a recent moment when you felt overwhelmed by strong emotions. Which of these strategies did you use or would you use in a similar moment in the future?
5. The discussion touches on the challenge of maintaining emotional flexibility within a hierarchy, especially when external constraints conflict with our personal values. What role do your core values play in determining when to be flexible versus when to stand firm?

6. Everyone has emotions. As discussed in this episode, suppressing them is maladaptive. If you tend to minimize your emotions or believe you're "not that emotional," what are some subtle signs in your life (e.g., stress, burnout, physical symptoms) that might indicate buried feelings?
7. Dr. Stephenson states that emotional flexibility is a skill that can be learned and improved with practice. What's one specific area of emotional flexibility you'd like to work on? Find a podclub accountability partner and commit to practicing this area over the next week. Check in with one another to keep going!
8. "Mirror Neurons" describes how approaching conversations with curiosity can foster trust and understanding. How might intentionally activating your "Mirror Neurons" by showing genuine curiosity change the dynamic of a challenging conversation you anticipate having? Practice doing that during this discussion with your pod club.
9. Based on this episode, what is one small change you are going to make to help improve in this area. How are you going to keep yourself accountable to that and measure your success? (Be sure to keep it simple, start small, and make it very clear).