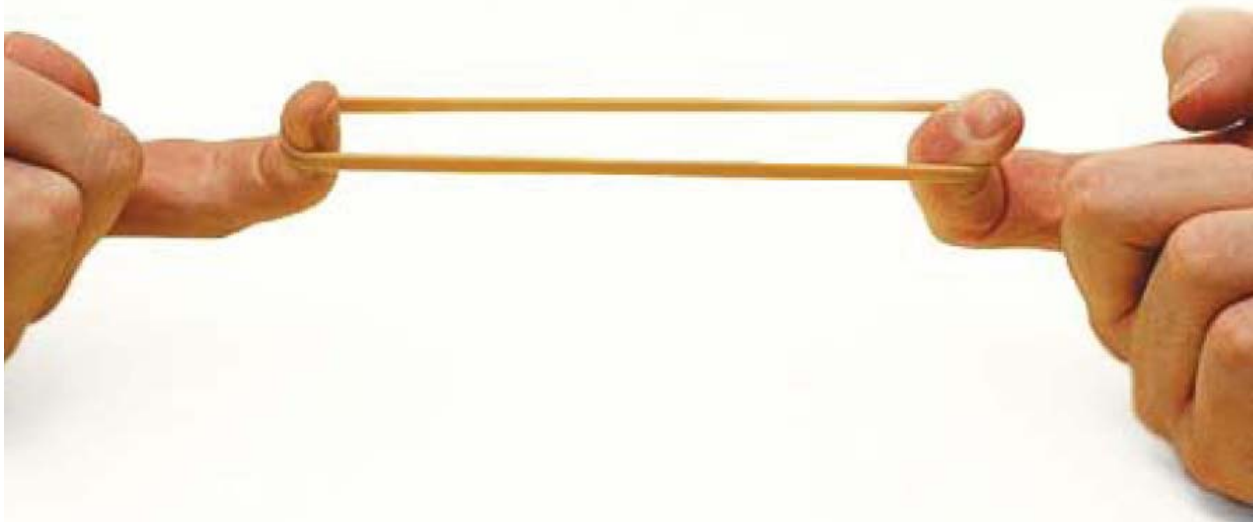


JUST ENOUGH ANXIETY

THE HIDDEN DRIVER OF
BUSINESS SUCCESS



ROBERT H. ROSEN

Chairman and CEO of Healthy Companies International

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The Hidden Driver of Business Success

by Robert Rosen, chairman and CEO, Healthy Companies International

Anxiety is a fact of life. How you use it makes all the difference. If you let it overwhelm you, it will turn to panic. If you deny or run from it, you will become complacent. But if you use anxiety in a positive way, you will turn it into a powerful force in your life. You will uncover the hidden driver of business success.

I'm basing this conclusion on five decades of life and my thirty-year career as a psychologist, entrepreneur, and CEO adviser. It is grounded in the face-to-face meetings I've had with more than 300 top business leaders in forty countries. In fact, my research has led me to three fundamental insights about great leadership:

- It's time to embrace change, uncertainty, and anxiety as facts of life.
- We can use our healthy anxiety as a positive force for growth.
- Just enough anxiety (JEA) is the key to living and leading in our complex world.

Let's face it: Anxiety drives the free enterprise system. Businesses vie for profits in a sea of anxiety, as their leaders strive to keep shareholders satisfied, adhere to board directives, engage employees, and keep customers happy. But, as most of us have discovered at one time or another, too much anxiety causes debilitating fear while too little leads to complacency. Both produce resistance to growth and change. It's like a rubber band: If you pull it too hard, it breaks. If you don't pull it hard enough, you fail to maximize its potential.

But why is it so difficult to deal with our anxiety in the first place? If anxiety is a fact of life, why do we try to hide from it? Or let ourselves get hijacked by it?

I believe the problem lies with our faulty thinking. It goes something like this: Change and uncertainty make me anxious. Anxiety is bad, a sign of weakness. Therefore, I have to avoid change and uncertainty. I have to do whatever I can to avoid anxiety.

Our faulty thinking comes from centuries of viewing change as dangerous, even life-threatening. It comes from medical models that frame anxiety as a mental health problem. And it comes from years of outmoded leadership practices that ignore the human side of business.

Our limited logic leads us to reject change, uncertainty, and anxiety as inherent and acceptable parts of life. We associate anxiety with fear, stress, and instability. We are afraid we can't understand or manage our anxiety, so we avoid, deny, resist, run away, or medicate it. And we refuse to see our anxiety as a major source of energy, in ourselves and our organizations.

It's time to change our perspective on anxiety. It's time to make better use of our brain power to manage the anxiety that accompanies change and uncertainty. It's time to evolve.

What is Just Enough Anxiety?

Just enough anxiety is the right level of healthy anxiety—at any given moment in time—that drives you forward without causing you to resist, give up, or try to control what happens. It unleashes your productive energy and makes you want to do better. Just enough anxiety gives you courage and confidence and helps you tackle problems, jump on opportunities, learn new

things, and change yourself and your organization. It produces the optimal state of arousal that enables you to stretch beyond your current reality into your desired future.

Leadership used to be about creating certainty. Now it is about leading through uncertainty. It is about continually transforming yourself and your organization to keep pace with unpredictable changes, problems, and opportunities. No one can keep playing the same game when the rules keep changing. What worked yesterday won't work tomorrow. What succeeds in one industry won't succeed in another. Effective strategies come and go faster than they can be replicated. Continuous improvement is no longer enough. Your business needs constant innovation to stay ahead of the competition.

As a leader, you have a choice. You can try to control or attack change. You can struggle to deny or resist change. Or you can choose to embrace change and shape the future. After all, there's no such thing as a stationary position in life or in business. If you're not moving forward, you're sliding backwards. With so little time for trial and error, you could be just a few decisions away from disaster. To thrive in today's chaotic seas, you must dramatically alter how you navigate your company's position in the marketplace.

Navigating the Gap

In today's ever-changing world, you must constantly navigate the performance gap between where you are and where you want to be. You enter the gap willingly whenever you envision new possibilities, seek to build a better organization, implement new technologies, or tackle a reorganization, merger, or acquisition. You fall into the gap when faced with unexpected consumer demands, loss of revenues, threats from increased competition, or corporate misconduct.

When the gap between your current reality and your desired future is too large, you feel too much anxiety and have trouble taking action. When it's too small, you feel no desire to act. In both cases, you shut down learning, growth, and performance. But, when the distance between here and there is big enough to make you stretch, yet small enough to be surmounted, you experience just enough anxiety to live and thrive in the gap.

Effective leaders are able to manage their own anxiety and reshape or re-size the gap—or people's perception of the gap—to create the right amount of anxiety for the situation. They know that anxiety is the energy that propels people through the gap. Instead of fighting to remain afloat on a river of change, these leaders use uncertainty and anxiety to stoke the engine and move full steam ahead. They see change and anxiety as opportunities to grow and learn. They continually transform themselves and their organizations to meet the challenges of the day.

My twenty years of research underscores one fact: The success of great leaders is all about creating the right level of anxiety for growth and performance. It shows up in their uncommon ability to create just enough tension—within themselves and their organizations—to unleash the human energy that drives powerful leadership, accelerated growth, and winning companies.

Just enough anxiety is the hidden driver of great leaders' success. But what makes a leader a JEA leader?

An Open Mind and an Open Heart

JEA leaders live and lead with an *open mind*. They are self-aware, telling the truth to themselves about who they are and what they desire. They are lifelong learners, committed to improving themselves, asking difficult questions, and admitting mistakes. And they are adept at

non-attachment, letting go of preconceived notions about life and staying open to new ideas and ways of doing things.

JEA leaders have an *open heart*. They are emotionally honest, experiencing and expressing in healthy ways the full range of human emotions. They are empathetic and compassionate, easily putting themselves in another's shoes and aware of the power of generosity and love. And they are emotionally resilient, keeping their balance through the inevitable ups and downs of life.

JEA leaders look at the world from a both/and perspective. They blend the best of *both* Eastern *and* Western thinking—seeing change and uncertainty as facts of life while handling whatever comes their way; trusting their intuition while thinking through problems systematically; and accepting what they can't control while controlling what they can. JEA leaders balance the drives for *both* protection *and* growth—avoiding unnecessary risks while taking advantage of promising opportunities; maintaining what's important while venturing into new territory; and replenishing their strength while putting forth extra effort when needed. Finally, JEA leaders embrace *both* personal power *and* uncertainty—taking charge of their lives while remaining open to the unexpected; creating specific goals while making necessary modifications; and anticipating the future and acting with courage in the present while remembering that some things are just beyond their control.

The Power of Paradox

JEA leaders live and lead in paradox. They have the uncanny knack of holding opposing forces inside themselves and throughout their organizations. All leaders are called upon to balance costs and revenues, growth and decline, innovation and efficiency. But great leaders do much more. They are masters at three key leadership paradoxes: *realistic optimism*, *constructive impatience*, and *confident humility*.

Realistic Optimism

Realistic optimism is the ability to imagine what's possible while having honest conversations about the reality of business today. Realistic leaders tell the truth about what's working and not working, and confront the tough issues. They understand the trends, competition, problems, and customer demands affecting their business, and focus on what matters. Optimistic leaders dream the future, invoking the power of hope in their people. They envision what's possible, see problems as fixable, and believe that the cup is half full. JEA leaders think in the present and future simultaneously; have the courage to dream and deliver; and trust themselves to create their own destiny.

Constructive Impatience

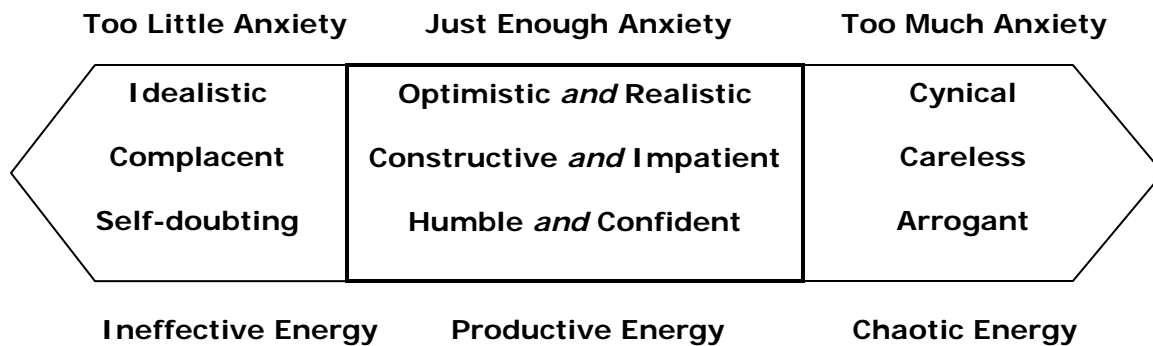
Constructive impatience is the ability to build a positive, supportive environment while instilling in people a sense of urgency and a drive for results. It involves living with and creating discomfort and excitement inside yourself and the people around you, stepping into the unknown, and allowing yourself to feel vulnerable. Constructive leaders see the best in people and create a working environment that is psychologically safe, characterized by trust, respect, and appreciation. Impatient leaders challenge themselves and others to be bigger and better tomorrow, constantly raising the bar and speaking directly to people's desire to win. JEA leaders challenge people while supporting them; create stretch goals while soliciting buy in; balance urgency and right timing; and promote both winning and win-win solutions.

Confident Humility

Confident humility is the ability to blend the best of masculine and feminine leadership, making things happen while empowering others to succeed. Confident leaders believe in themselves, are comfortable with their personal power, and shape their environment. They also share power with others and develop leaders, able to hold their power and give it away at the same time.

Humble leaders listen and learn from others; build great relationships; and are great teachers. They are generous and compassionate. JEA leaders believe in themselves while trusting their people; act with authority while sharing power and building a strong leadership pipeline; live their values while honoring others; and speak their minds while listening to and learning from what others have to say.

Not all leaders are able to live and lead with an open mind and open heart, see the world through both/and perspective, or master the three key leadership paradoxes. If they become idealistic, complacent, or self-doubting, they create too little anxiety for their organizations to be effective. If they become cynical, careless, or arrogant, they create too much anxiety and drown their organizations in chaos. In either case, they are unable to navigate the gaps between current and desired realities created by constant change.



The Three Faces of Anxiety

JEA leaders find their power in the center, constantly balancing between too little and too much anxiety. What kind of leader are you?

Leading with Too Little Anxiety (TLA)

Too little anxiety is the face of complacency. It is grounded in contentment. If you have too little anxiety, you avoid change. You value the status quo and believe that everything will be okay as long as nothing changes. Your minimal level of anxiety creates boredom and stagnation in your organization. People lack a sense of urgency and fail to confront the tough issues. They may get caught up in analysis paralysis. Mediocre performance abounds.

TLA leaders come in four shapes and sizes. *Idealistic* leaders live in a fantasy world; *detached* leaders isolate themselves from the world; *overpleasing* leaders live in other people's worlds; and *cautious* leaders are frightened by the world. All TLA leaders live in a bubble. People in their organizations are slow and unproductive. They waste energy, miss out on opportunities, and eventually lose out to the competition.

Leading with Too Much Anxiety (TMA)

Too much anxiety is the face of fear. It comes from negative thinking. If you have too much anxiety, you attack change. You become combative or controlling as you try to ease the pain you feel. Your over-the-top level of anxiety creates frustration and chaos in your organization. Morale is low and stress is high. People make mistakes and fail to reach their potential.

There are four basic types of TMA leaders. *Egotistical* leaders expect the world to revolve around them; *perfectionist* leaders try to orchestrate the way the world works; *volatile* leaders believe it's just them against the world; and *suspicious* leaders are mistrustful of the world around them. All TMA leaders are seduced by change and overly attached to success. Their organizations run on frenetic energy. People are disorganized and work quality is haphazard.

Leading with Just Enough Anxiety (JEA)

Just enough anxiety is the face of success. It grows out of the ability to be comfortable with discomfort. If you have just enough anxiety, you embrace change. You reach for opportunities to learn and grow. Your “just enough” level of anxiety unleashes human energy and creates hope and momentum in your organization.

JEA leaders don't come in types. But they do have qualities in common. They

- willing to travel into the unknown, unpredictable, and unexpected
- set an evolving course through ambiguity, complexity and change
- challenge people to perform beyond their expectations of themselves
- learn and teach in real time
- imagine possibilities and release the creative energies inside their businesses

JEA leaders live and lead with an open mind and an open heart, see the world from a both/and perspective, and are masters at realistic optimism, constructive impatience, and confident humility. As a result, they consistently turn anxiety into productive energy, making it a catalyst for growth and change. They continually transform themselves and their organizations to adapt to external circumstances. And they successfully close the gaps between where they are and where they want to be to build winning performance companies.



Change Begins with You

As a leader, you are the steward of anxiety inside your organization. Your ability to manage your own anxiety directly affects your ability to help others manage theirs. It determines how effective you are in unleashing and mobilizing the creative energy inside your organization.

You need just enough anxiety to drive positive change. It is the fuel that stimulates growth. It is the productive energy that solves problems and averts crises. Just enough anxiety is the hidden driver of business success—inside you and your organization.

As you develop and nurture your ability to create and live with just enough anxiety, you will be better able to learn, change, and navigate in a complicated world. You will achieve more of what your heart desires. You will live a happier, more fulfilled life. You will become a JEA leader.

There's an old Indian folk tale about a Cherokee elder who one evening told his grandson about the battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, cynicism, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, curiosity, confidence, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

Yes indeed, it is all about the one you feed. And the choice is yours.