

## The Power of Regret – Daniel H. Pink

Regret is not dangerous or abnormal. It is valuable because it clarifies and instructs. (8)

Our emotions are like a portfolio and have a range. We tend to overvalue one category and undervalue the other. Overweighting our emotional investments with too much positivity brings its own dangers. The imbalance can inhibit learning, stymie growth, and limit our potential. Negative emotions are essential, because they help us develop and survive. (13)

Regret is better understood less as a thing and more as a process using two abilities: the mind's reflection on the past and the future in our heads. (18)

Two steps: First, we compare. Then, we assess blame. Regret is your own fault, not someone else's. (22)

**Regret involves counterfactual thinking:** countering the facts. Counterfactuals point us in two directions – down or up. “At Least” are the downward points (picturing how an alternative could have been worse). “If Only” are the upward points (imagining how things could have gone better). (35) The paradox is that downward pointing “at leasts” make us feel better, where upward pointing “if onlys” make us feel worse. “If Onlys” outnumber “At Leasts” in people's lives, often by 80%. (38)

**Three benefits of regret:** 1. Regret can improve decisions (experience promotes considering more options). 2. Regret can boost performance (deepens persistence). 3. Regret can deepen meaning. (48)

We act in order to survive. We think in order to act. Burying negative emotions doesn't dissipate them. It intensifies them. Sitting in negative emotions for too long can cause rumination that inhibits forward progress. The healthier view is “Feeling is for Thinking” where we don't dodge emotions, and we don't wallow in them. We confront and optimize them for future behavior. If thinking is for doing, feeling can help us think. (53)

Framing evaluates a particular behavior in a particular situation, allowing the experience to become instructive.

Healthy regret chain: heart signals the head, the head signals action. All regrets aggravate. Productive regrets aggravate then activate. Your response determines your result. (54)

Feeling is for ignoring = Delusion. Feeling is for feeling = Despair. Feeling is for thinking = Deeper Decisions.

Most common regrets: Women = family/romance. Less educated = education. Single, white = romance. Men = career. Areas where the opportunities had vanished produced the most regrets. (68)

Four types of regrets: Foundation. Boldness. Moral. Connection.

Foundation = stability. Boldness = chances not taken. Moral = compromised goodness. Connection = unrealized or broken relationships. (80)

**Foundation Regrets [Stability]** – If only I'd done the work. Overvaluing the now and undervaluing the latter. (87) “Too much” followed by “too little.” Compounding - Slow growing missteps. (89) Often involve failure to recognize the problem and seek a remedy. The fix – not only change the person, but reconfigure the person's situation, setting, and environment. (95) The lesson – Think ahead. Do the work. Start now. (96)

**Boldness Regrets [Growth]** – If only I’d taken that risk. Begin with a voice that isn’t heard. Long-term people regret inactions more than actions, because when we act, we know what happened next whereas the consequences for inaction are general, abstract, and unbounded. (105) Inaction thwarts growth and exploration; negates authenticity. (109) The lesson – Speak up. Take that trip. Step off the train. (111)

**Moral Regrets [Goodness]** – If only I had done the right thing. Start at juncture of two paths but are complex as they involve a wider set of values. (115) Five pillars of morality: Care/Harm; Fairness/Cheating; Loyalty/Disloyalty; Authority/Subversion; Purity/Desecration. (118). Involve actions more than inactions. (121) Trust, bonds, and coalitions are broken. The lesson – When in doubt, do the right thing. (129)

**Connection Regrets [Love]** – If only I’d reached out. (133) Avoiding an open door because it requires effort. (135) Threaten our sense of belonging. Rifts begin with a catalyzing incident; Drifts lack a discernible path. (138) Rifts are more dramatic, and Drifts are more common. Drifts are harder to mend because the emotions are subtler and can feel less legitimate. Rifts generate strong emotions that are familiar, easier to identify and comprehend. The lesson – Open doors = Do something now. Closed doors = Do better next time. (146)

**Three selves: “Actual Self” (current attributes); “Ideal Self” (could be); “Ought Self” (should be).** The goals we pursue are based on the discrepancies among these three selves. Regrets of “coulda” outnumber regrets of “shoulda” by three to one. (151) Discrepancies between actual and ideal leave us dejected, whereas discrepancies between actual and ought to make us agitated and more likely to act. Failures to become our ideal selves are failures to pursue opportunities whereas failures to become our ought selves are failures to fulfill obligations. Opportunity and obligation sit at the center of regret, but opportunity holds the prominent seat. Too much obligation creates a crumpled life; too much opportunity creates a hollow life. Find balance.

Remedy for action regrets is change the immediate situation for the better by making amends, reversing choices, or erasing consequences. A way to address the present is to recase the way we think about previous actions. (164) Move the “If only” to “At least” to create relief.

**Three-step regret process:** 1. Disclose; 2. Reframe; 3. Extract a Lesson

Disclosure first involves self-disclosure. Use self-compassion to normalize negative experiences whereby neutralizing them. (174) Self-criticism leads to debilitation and self-esteem leads to vanity/comparison. Self-compassion seeks not to suppress or overidentify.

**Self-distancing:** the process of considering the situation from the third-person perspective to become a detached observer. This helps you analyze and strategize by shifting from the immersive act of recounting to the more distanced act of reconstruing which regulates emotions and redirects behaviors. (178)

Create distance from regrets through 1. Space (physical and mental); 2. Time; 3. Self

**Seven techniques:** 1. Start a regret circle; 2. Create a failure resume; 3. Study self-compassion; 4. Pair new resolutions with old regrets; 5. Mentally subtract positive events; 6. Participate in the World Regret Survey; 7. Adopt a journey mindset. (185)

**Loss aversion** – we find the pain of losing something greater than the pleasure of gaining the equivalent, so we go to extraordinary (and often irrational) lengths to avoid losses. Anticipating our regrets slows our thinking. When we envision how awful it might feel in the future if we don’t act appropriately now, that

negative emotion – which we can simulate rather than experience – can improve our behavior. (193) The downside with anticipated regrets as a decision-making tool is that we are bad at predicting the intensity and duration of our emotions. We're particularly inept at predicting regret. We overestimate how negative we'll feel and underestimate our capacity to cope with "At Leasts". Anticipation of regrets can steer us away from the best decision and toward the decision that most shields us from regret. (197) Minimizing regret is not the same as minimizing risk. Regret aversion can lead to decision aversion. Anticipated regret distorts our judgement, because haunted by the prospect of "If Only", we err. (200) Constantly trying to anticipate and minimize our regrets becomes an unhealthy maximizing.

**Regret Optimization Framework:** devote time and effort to anticipate the four core regrets and forego regrets outside these categories. Begin by asking whether you are dealing with one of the four core regrets. If not, satisfice. If yes, deliberate. (203) Regret offers the ultimate redemption narrative.

Overview (205):

Big Four Regrets: 1. Foundation (Stability) 2. Boldness (Growth) 3. Moral (Goodness) 4. Connection (Love).

For an Action Regret: 1. Undo it; 2. At Least It.

For any Regret (Action or Inaction): 1. Self-Disclosure; 2. Self-Compassion; 3. Self-Distancing.

Decision-Making using Anticipated Regrets: 1. Satisfice on most decisions; 2. Maximize on crucial decisions.