

# Your Feelings Will Get You Into Trouble If You Let Them

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by Brad Miller

Everyone has heard the phrase, “Follow your heart.” This is certainly well-intended thinking that is based exclusively on feelings which can be very helpful and even very romantic. But without any context or qualifiers, this kind of thinking will get you into trouble much of the time! I would even say that we should never let our feelings override our intelligence. Additionally, we all need to realize that our feelings should only inform our beliefs about ourselves as well as the world around us, not drive us to make life-altering decisions. To be clear, our feelings can be very, very influential in our daily lives, but they need to be balanced somehow. It is a fact that your marriage today is a byproduct of yesterdays decisions, and those decisions were helped along by your feelings. So, how can we find a balance between facts and feelings, between what is actually true and what feels true? Let us explain . . .

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Think about some of the things your heart would have you do if you always followed it. Let’s assume you and your spouse went out to dinner one night. Maybe there was someone at another table in the restaurant watching you while you were there and even giving you a flirtatious look!. Your heart was racing and telling you to take the next step and introduce yourself, but it turns out the other person was married — and so are you! Maybe your body’s chemistry is off and telling you that you feel down, worthless, unloved, and a burden to others; maybe it feels like the world would get along fine without you — but it’s just not true, even though it feels true. Would following your heart in either of these two examples have been a good idea? Maybe you feel something that doesn’t match up with reality. For example, I once met a very intelligent man who had his reasons to feel that the earth was flat even though we have science to prove otherwise. True story. In all of these examples, feelings and the manner in which they influenced a person were not helpful and could even be quite harmful.

How about a few scenarios that showcase feelings in a bit more positive light? Maybe you have a group of friends who jokingly refer to themselves as, “the wild ones.” On one particular night this group invited you to go out drinking with them. You thought about tagging along on their escapade, but you just knew something didn’t feel right. As it turns out, “the wild ones” got into some trouble that night at a nightclub. There was no trouble for you since you decided not to go, you felt it was a bad idea. It turns out that sometimes feelings can be helpful. Here’s another example. You and your spouse exchanged some tense words before you dashed out the door to head to your meeting and parted ways for the day. After just an hour or so, you began to feel bad about something you said and the way things were left. Your feelings in this example, would compel you to contact your spouse, apologize for your tense words, and assure your spouse that everything was going to be okay with you both. It seems that there are times when our feelings can be very helpful as well as times when feelings can be harmful. How do we know the difference?

Think of the last time you flew on a commercial airline. That flight most likely had both a pilot and a co-pilot on board. Since both the pilot and the co-pilot are licensed and rated to fly a commercial airplane, what are the differences in their roles? It turns out, the primary distinction between the roles of the pilot and the co-pilot is that the pilot carries the weight of responsibility and authority for the safety of the airplane and its passengers. Since the pilot bears most of the responsibility, the co-pilot's job is to inform the pilot with information to help him/her make the best decisions. Think of your logical brain as the pilot and your feelings as the co-pilot. Just like the pilot, your logical brain should carry the weight of responsibility and authority to do what is best for you. Your feelings, much like the co-pilot, should serve to inform your logical brain, the pilot. In this way, your feelings should not be making decisions alone but should be informing your logical brain so that the decisions can be made there.

Another way to understand a healthy balance between feelings and logic would be to acknowledge that our impulses and desires are mostly about our feelings, but deciding whether or not to act on those impulses and desires is a job for logic. If we are all being honest, there have been plenty of times when our feelings alone would have gotten us into a heap of trouble, but our logic won out and saved the day. Well, hopefully, our logic won and saved the day.

With this better understanding of how logic and feelings should work together for our benefit, read each of the examples above one more time to see where feelings helped and where they didn't. Can you see how it would have been better for feelings to merely provide some information to the pilot as opposed to making the decisions for the pilot? This is the healthiest way for us to coexist with our feelings which can sometimes seem so out of control. Teach your feelings to know their place as a co-pilot, but not to usurp the pilot's authority. If you can do this well, you will have a happier, healthier marriage with minimal conflicts and the regrets that come from those conflicts. Here's another clever way to think of feelings:

“Feelings are like children, you don't want them driving the car, but you shouldn't stuff them in the trunk either!”

Lastly, if you are a woman who is struggling to wrap your head around the concept of logic, or a man who is struggling to understand feelings, what follows is the best advice you will ever receive on this topic. **Seek to understand your spouse's world.** If your spouse deals mostly in logic and you deal mostly in emotions (or vice versa), take the time to understand your spouse better and to see how their way of viewing things brings a balance to your marriage that you would never have if you were alone. The opposite is true as well. If your spouse deals mostly with emotions and you deal mostly with logic, take the time to understand your spouse better.

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