



Managing Emotions Under Pressure: How to Empty Your Bucket to Stay Calm and Productive in any Situation

“**L**osing it,” “having a meltdown,” “freaking out”... this is what we say when someone isn’t managing his/her emotions in a productive manner. I like to call it having an exaggerated response.

I believe everyone has a bucket inside of them. When something causes stress, frustrates you, makes you angry or requires a lot of attention and energy the bucket starts to fill. When your bucket fills completely you are likely to have an exaggerated response and overreact to even the simplest of stressors.

Things that can fill your bucket include:

- Sick child
- Remodeling your home
- Work deadlines
- Trying to lose weight
- Long commutes to work
- Being sick
- Difficult spouse
- Difficult coworkers or boss
- Financial stress
- Job loss
- Divorce
- Learning new skills
- Going back to school

Ways to empty your bucket before it gets full include:

- Getting enough sleep
- Exercise
- Spending quality time with friends and family
- Church involvement
- Community Volunteering
- Hobbies
- Reading
- Staying organized
- Meditation

Be careful not to choose ways to empty your bucket with activities that cause it to fill back up causing even more stress. I call it “stress recycling.” Poor choices for emptying your bucket include:

- Affairs
- Alcohol abuse
- Substance abuse (illegal and prescription)
- Smoking
- Gambling
- Gossip
- Compulsive shopping
- Overeating
- Antisocial activities like lying, behaving impulsively
- Withdrawing from social activities and groups
- Borrowing money and not repaying it

“While each position at a credit union has its fair share of stress,” says The People’s CU branch supervisor Jasmine

Villarreal, “I truly believe that the front line (tellers, member services, and loans) receive the bulk of stress on a daily basis.” These positions have to be able to “handle the roller coaster of emotions and demands that will walk through our door on a daily basis.” Trying to calm down an upset member whose bucket is full can also cause the credit union employee’s bucket to get full.

Here are five smart moves for keeping your bucket from getting full and for managing your emotions under pressure:

- **Focus on the facts.** Shift your thoughts to a factual level. This helps diminish the emotional intensity of the situation and increases your ability to handle a situation productively.
- **Try to feel your toes:** I don’t mean literally. If you start bending over in front of people, I’d really be worried about you. Instead, in your mind, concentrate on what the bottom of your feet feel like and get your breathing under control. I’d tell you to walk away but many times you can’t. I’d tell you to count to 10, but that isn’t enough. Concentrate on your feet and get your breathing under control.
- **Simplify and stay in the here-and-now.** Soldiers often say that time seemed to slow down when they were faced with a life or death situation which helped them focus on surviving. Many can’t even articulate how they knew what to do under pressure because it seemed automatic.
- **Ride your bicycle up the hill.** In other words, test yourself often. Terrie Johnson, vice president of Lending and Support Services at Texas Trust CU says that after 33 years at her credit union she rarely feels stress unless she is put in an unfamiliar situation. Practice for times when you will need additional emotional endurance by working through tough and unfamiliar situations. Don’t wait for a tragedy in your life to find out what you are made of. Start with smaller events that will build up your resilience. If you don’t like to speak in front of others, try to do so in small doses before you are asked to present to your company board. Don’t automatically migrate to the software you are familiar with because it’s easier. By testing yourself often, you will build the confidence and skills needed for situations you can’t predict or control when under pressure.
- **Focus on what you can control** like your facial expressions, how honest you are, the amount of effort you put into your work, how well you listen, etc. When we feel out of control our emotional responses are less productive.

By using these smart moves, you can help yourself and your credit union work in the smart zone. 