

# The Eight “F’s” of Chronic Anxiety

Charles Stone

A leader is like a transformer. By his responses, he can either defuse an emotional setting like a heated board meeting or can act like a step-up transformer by reacting and increasing anxiety, thus causing lots of not-so-cool sparks, as we leaders often do. Through a calm presence with emotional people, a leader can act like an emotional step-down transformer, decreasing the group’s anxiety by letting it pass through him without getting zapped.

Sometimes as leaders, however, we can characterize emotionality and anxiety one-dimensionally as defensiveness. But chronic anxiety, the low-level anxiety we seem to never shake, fuels emotionality and shows up in eight ways that I call “the eight “F’s” of chronic anxiety.” It manifests itself differently in different people. As you read the list below, consider which “F” tempts you the most.

1. **Fight:** emotionally reacting and becoming defensive (how we usually describe emotionality)
2. **Flee:** emotionally or physically cutting off from others in anxious situations
3. **Freeze:** not knowing what to do, thus not taking a position; offering no opinion and/ or staying neutral when you should take a position
4. **Fuse:** losing your identity by glomming on to others’ wants and desires, compromising convictions, seeking unity at all costs and/ or trying to force everybody to be one big, happy family
5. **Fixate:** easily getting triangled into unhealthy relationships and conflict
6. **Fix:** overperforming to fix somebody else’s problems or doing for others what they should do for themselves
7. **Flounder:** becoming passive, underperforming, or giving up
8. **Feed/ fornicate/ finances:** inappropriately yielding to base impulses by turning to food, illicit sex/ pornography or inappropriate use of money.

When we are tempted to deal with our anxiety with one of the 8 F’s, we must look to Jesus. Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions. He wept when he heard that Lazarus had died. He became angry at the temple moneychangers. He felt a heavy heart in the garden of Gethsemane. Yet his behavior reflected anything but anxious reactivity.

The Bible tells us that the Lord has given us everything we need to live a godly life. God has crafted our bodies and brains, our souls and minds, and our regenerated hearts with the capability to cool our emotions amid emotionality. Acting calmly when tempted to do otherwise, glorifies him.

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”*

I Peter 1:3