

# Feeling guilty? good!

Guilt has gotten a bad name. We associate guilt with depression, heaviness, or an uncomfortable "trip" someone tries to send us on. Some of us think of guilt as a tool of manipulation used to influence, control, or suppress our beliefs and actions. But let's take another look. Actually, no one can make us feel guilty. Guilty feelings arise from within when we experience remorse or regret over something we have done or something we have neglected to do. Guilt is a natural consequence of our recognition that our behavior is not consistent with our beliefs, values, or goals. Ruminating about a mistake we have made, the agony of remorse, the twangs of regret, and the weight of a burdened conscience can be excruciating. Doesn't guilt keep us from feeling happy and free? Shouldn't we try to get rid of our guilt?

You may be surprised to learn what behavioral scientists and apparently my grandmother have known for years: feelings of guilt are actually good for you! In fact, studies have shown that guilty feelings are associated with healthy emotional functioning and satisfying relationships. It is crucial that human beings experience feelings of guilt. Without guilt, we would live in a world of psychopaths, each of us unable to empathize with others, hurting each other without a second thought.

The pain of guilt motivates us to take reparative action. It prompts us

to try to make up for our mistakes. It drives us to repair our relationships. The emotional discomfort associated with guilt reminds us to work harder in the future to act in a manner consistent with how we want to be in the world.

Whereas guilt encourages us to make amends, feelings of shame are a different matter. Shame involves the belief that there is something wrong with us. Whereas guilt lets us know we made a mistake, shame tells us we are the mistake. Feelings of shame are linked to psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. With shame, there is no path to reconciliation or redemption. When we feel shame, we feel hopeless. We feel worthless. We feel incompetent. As a result, we withdraw, give up, shut down, and avoid contact with others. Thus feelings of shame threaten to rob us of the benefits that feelings of guilt and our related attempts to repair relationships provide us.

Guilt is only as good as it motivates us to action. Don't let yourself be paralyzed by your feelings of guilt. Do your best to separate your self-worth from your bad behaviors, and consider taking the following steps:

## KAUA'I BUSINESS REPORT

Step 1: Accept responsibility for your behavior. Healthy emotional functioning requires us to take full responsibility for our actions. Making excuses for why we did something we know we should not have done is an exercise in futility. You feel guilty for a reason. You messed up.

Step 2: Seek to understand. Making mistakes is a part of being human. Regardless of the severity of your misdeed, it is important for you to have appropriate compassion. Without excusing your actions, ask yourself the following: Did I intend to do harm? Did I do the best I could with the knowledge I had at the time? Was it an accident? Did I hurt someone else because I was carrying some unresolved hurt of my own? How would I judge a friend or loved one who did what I did under similar conditions? Remember that your regretted action or inaction was a behavior and not a personality trait. In other words, you screwed-up but you are not a "screw-up".

Step 3. Make a confession. Whether it is a trusted friend, relative, counselor, or clergy member, share with

## YOU'RE NOT ALONE



DR. BRAD KLONTZ

Clinical psychologist

someone else the full details of your actions. Explore the context from which your action or inaction arose. Talk about your intentions, whether they were good or bad. If you feel intense remorse, allow yourself to express your feelings of sadness, regret, frustration, or anger.

Step 4. Make a repair plan. The more harmful or hurtful your actions, the more time you need to put into developing a repair plan. This is when the advice of a trusted mentor, counselor, or clergy member may be essential. Care must be taken to avoid doing more harm in the process of trying to make things right.

In the 12-step tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous, it is recommended that direct amends be made whenever possible, but not when the doing so might cause further injury. If direct apologies are not in order, consider how you can improve the lives of others given what you have learned from your mistake.

Step 5. Take reparative action. If you are going to make a direct apol-

ogy allow the person you hurt or offended to share with you how your actions affected them. Do not interrupt. It is important that apologies be made with the intent of making the other person feel better, not you! Do not apologize with the expectation that your apology be accepted.

Step 6. Don't do it again. If you do it again, see Step 1. If you can't seem to stop doing the same thing over and over, seek some professional help. You won't regret it.

The next time you are feeling guilty, don't ignore your feelings or try to push them away. These uncomfortable feelings are a signal to you that your behaviors are not consistent with your values. Guilt gives you the opportunity to repair and improve your relationship with yourself and with others. Take advantage of the opportunity.

*Dr. Brad Klontz is the 2007 President-Elect of the Hawaii Psychological Association and author of The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge. He can be reached by e-mail at [brad@klontzcoaching.com](mailto:brad@klontzcoaching.com). For free, confidential referrals to a psychologist in your area, contact the HPA online at [www.hawaiipsych.org](http://www.hawaiipsych.org) or call (808) 521-8995.*

**FOR SALE**  
OCÉ 7055  
BLUEPRINT COPY  
MACHINE  
Works perfect  
Comes with supplies  
**\$4000 or best offer**  
**(808) 826-7331**  
Call for more information

**HAMCO**  
1870 Leleiona Street  
Lihue, HI 96766-9000  
Supplier of glass products  
and hardware.  
Repairs & installation.  
Joni Patricio  
Manager  
License #C-21761  
Ph. (808) 245-8793  
Fax (808) 245-3642

**Something terrible happens  
when you don't advertise ...**  
**NOTHING!**  
Call 245-3681

**QuickBooks  
Consulting**  
Our firm will install, design and  
implement your in-house accounting  
program. We will train you to get the  
most out of QuickBooks.  
Call us at 246-9422  
**Oberg & Free**  
Certified Public Accountants  
The CPA. Never Underestimate The Value.™

**QUEST CAPITAL® STRATEGIES, INC.**  
Member NASD, SIPC & MSRB 25231 Pasco de Alicia, Suite 110  
Laguna Hills, CA 92653  
(800) 433-0003  
Ronald J. Holte [www.questcapital.com](http://www.questcapital.com)  
Registered Representative  
7037 Pomaikai St.  
P.O. BOX 1027  
Kapaa, HI 96746  
808-821-1330/800-888-8870  
Fax: 808-821-1331  
**INVESTMENT  
SERVICES**

**Kauai's Full Service Mortgage Resource**

- Jumbo & Super Jumbo Loans
- 100% Financing
- 30, 40 & 50 Year Fixed Loans
- Interest Only
- Pick-a-Payment (Option Arms)
- Lucrative Investor Programs
- Land & Construction to Perm Loans
- 1031 Exchanges
- Commercial Loans

Service with Aloha 7 days a week! Visit our website to pre-qualify.

**Creative Capital  
& Mortgage**

4473 Pahee Street, Suite N  
Lihue, HI 96766  
(808) 246-1787 office  
(808) 246-1784 FAX  
[www.ccm-loans.com](http://www.ccm-loans.com)

Veronica Lovesy,  
Principal Broker  
[veronica@ccm-loans.com](mailto:veronica@ccm-loans.com)  
808-346-5700 cell

Jaelyn Cannon,  
Sr. Loan Officer  
[jackie@ccm-loans.com](mailto:jackie@ccm-loans.com)  
808-647-0878 cell