



Bringing Emotions into The Workplace



Emotions matter. Emotional intelligence is a critical 21st-century skill, and as such, companies with emotionally intelligent executive teams have a competitive advantage. Today, managers and executives must not only master their own emotions, but also craft strategies to support emotions at work. Doing so ultimately creates a more productive, supportive and energizing work environment for all.

How We Got Here

For most of the 20th century, companies valued employees who behaved like robots. When the limiting factor in increasing productivity was increasing the efficiency of assembly line workers, having emotions at work became a liability. If a worker had to take a moment during factory work to process their emotions, that would hold up the production line. In fact, our current educational system is said to have been developed to train people to become assembly line workers who could be easily replaced. But humans aren't emotionless robots or machines.

But the world has changed. We have actual machines to complete assembly line manufacturing, and the skills needed to succeed in today's workforce have changed.

Why Emotions Matter

It can be challenging to leave emotions behind when coming to work — it's why crying happens in the bathroom when people are expected to smile at their desks. Emotions, particularly negative emotions, can be distracting at best and be debilitating at worst. Moreover, positive and negative emotions are contagious. Emotions can spread unconsciously among people in groups, such that when you encounter someone in a bad mood, you may unknowingly begin to feel upset as well.

The truth is that try as we might, emotions leak out of us. Your employees' emotions leak out to each other and your customers and potential customers. And a potential customer sensing negative emotions is less likely to become an actual paying customer. In contrast, a potential customer who senses excitement and joy from a business's employees may feel more energized, allowing you to move them further down your sales funnel.

Thus, it is essential to be aware of your feelings and inner emotions — to connect with those emotions and name them. Without this awareness, it is difficult to manage or change those feelings.



Still not convinced? Research has found that employees working in cultures of joy and compassion show increased commitment and reduced burnout.

Expressing Emotions Versus Being Emotional

Some people think that strong negative emotions are linked to raised voices, slammed doors, eye-rolling and more. In short, people think that strong negative emotions result in venting, which we know to be unproductive. But these are simply unskillful expressions of suppressed negative emotions — expressions that can cause harm to others.

In contrast, expressing emotions begins with getting in touch with how we feel. It's important to take responsibility for how we express those emotions and how those expressions impact those around us.

Practical Tips

Let's go over some tips to develop your emotional intelligence and to encourage your team to bring their emotions to work. Doing so will do more than increase productivity; you'll create a workplace that employees feel supported in, allowing you to recruit new employees more competitively.

1. Learn The Language Of Emotions

Tools like Emotion wheels, RULER's Mood Meter or Atlas of Emotions can develop your vocabulary of emotions. Soon you'll be able to name the wide range of emotions that are part of the human experience — energized, lonely, worried, peaceful, motivated, fuming and anxious are all valid feelings. When you name your emotions, you defuse them and take away their power. From there, start adjusting how you react to your emotions.

2. Conduct Check-Ins

Once you and your team are comfortable with the language of emotions — have started developing emotional intelligence — you can begin to incorporate ways to encourage and allow employees to bring their emotions to work. Conduct individual or group check-ins that encourage employees to share what they feel, be aware of where their attention is and process and manage their emotions.

Some teams use a green-yellow-red check-in system, where green indicates that you're in the flow, while yellow means you're feeling off, and red means you have some feelings blocking you (feelings that you are encouraged to tend to before you get back to work). Others prefer the RULER Mood Meter with its yellow/green versus red/blue check-ins and its ability to allow people to be more expressive. However you structure these check-ins, they should encourage your employees to express and manage their emotions for the goal of increasing employee productivity and satisfaction.



3. Encourage Positive Emotions

Creating a kudos board — whether virtual or in your office — where people can post kind words about their co-workers can help employees get in touch with and share positive feelings. You can also schedule or periodically remind people to breathe or relax. Encouraging positive emotions at work will pay dividends.

4. Honest Leadership

I recommend that leaders be aware of their mood and deliberately energize and lift their spirits before interacting with their teams. Leaders must be honest with themselves and their team members about their feelings. Faking positive emotions can only fool people for short periods of time, but your true feelings will eventually leak out. Your team will pick up on your posture, facial expressions and vocal expressions to “catch” your negative emotions. Moreover, faking emotions can also lead your team to distrust your words — which can lead to disastrous consequences.

Today, managers and executives must use their emotional intelligence to not only manage how they present their emotions, but also to encourage the spread of emotions that will contribute to higher productivity, increased job satisfaction and improved team performance. Paying attention to the emotions in your workplace may be the difference between success and failure for you and your business.

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