MANAGING EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

www.proactive-resolutions.com. Information overload, constant change, scarce resources—it’s no wonder the modern workplace is such an emotionally complex environment. And no wonder too that we often forget, in the middle of a yet another hectic day, that the way we respond to emotions at work may be adding to that complexity. Emotional intelligence in the workplace—particularly in our managers—is precisely what we all need.

It’s no exaggeration to say that at the management level, emotional intelligence skills are more valuable than technical skills. A typical manager spends as much as 40% of his or her time dealing with conflicts between employees (Washington Business Journal, May 2005). This statistic is staggering. Consider the lost productivity.

That’s why the most valuable managers in any organization are those who adapt and are efficient at handling emotional situations. The fact is emotional intelligence is essential to anyone who wants to develop, lead and motivate others.

You can’t manage others effectively until you learn how to understand and respond to their emotions—and you can’t manage their emotions until you learn how to manage your own.

5 Steps to Managing Our Emotions at Work

Emotions at their core are involuntary, often physiological, responses beyond our control. When you’re scared your pulse quickens and your heart feels like it’s pounding, and there’s little you can do to change that. But you can understand why you feel the way you do and choose to respond in ways that are healthy and constructive. Here are five key things we can all do to better manage our emotions.

1. Learn to accept and value emotions at work. We can’t prevent emotions, so we need to accept them. When channeled correctly, emotions can be a great source of strength. Emotions are okay.

2. Pay attention to your body. Your body usually knows what emotion you are feeling before your mind does. Take a moment to think about your physical sensations (that pounding heart, for example). This is your chance to diffuse negative feelings before they get the better of you.

3. Pay attention to your instincts. You know that gut feeling that tells you when something just isn’t right? This raw information may be the most valuable—and underused—resources we have as humans. Is instinct telling you to get out of an uncomfortable situation? Are you sensing that a colleague is stressed about something? Instincts are the messages our bodies send to keep us out of danger, give us insight into complex interpersonal relationships, and help us generate spontaneous solutions to tricky situations. Listen to them.

4. Pay attention to your perceptions. What you feel reveals how you perceive an event or action, and much of the time our perceptions have little to do with the other person involved. Make it a habit to question your perceptions and assumptions. Ask yourself where they come from and whether there’s evidence that they are correct.
5. **Regulate your emotions at work.** You can’t – and shouldn’t – stop experiencing emotions, but you can learn to use them more effectively. First, recognize that you will only fuel a negative situation by adding negative emotions to it. Then take several deep breaths (which calms the nervous system) and ask yourself, what can I do to diffuse this situation for myself or others? This may be as simple as acknowledging another’s viewpoint (e.g., “I see why this situation must be difficult for you…”) and calmly offering help (“Can we try a different approach…”). By focusing on a rational solution, you can not only regulate negative emotions but also redirect them into positive action.

These are the first steps to understanding and managing your own emotions, skills that will put you on the path to stronger overall emotional intelligence. Once you internalize these basic skills, you’ll be ready to use your emotional intelligence to make your work environment healthier, happier and more productive for everyone.

**ProActive’s leadership team** presents to audiences worldwide on topics relating to workplace conflict resolution, and the company is the approved vendor in numerous markets. ProActive has offices in Canada, Australia and the U.S.

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North America: 1.877.585.9933
Australia: (02) 9221-0446