

Managing Emotions in the Workplace

"Emotions must be managed the same way as time, equipment, funds and other resources," said Edward T. Reilly, president and CEO of American Management Association. "Too often, uncontrolled emotions are the product of excessive stress. Left to grow, fiery emotions can actually fuel the feelings of stress, leading to further angry words and unproductive activity. We can't always control feelings of stress, but we should make an effort to control the disruptive emotions that they may trigger," Reilly said. He offers the following advice:

- Pay attention to your emotions. They cause you to focus on what is happening around you and they put you in touch with how you are responding to a particular situation. Don't ignore your emotions hoping the situation will go away. It won't.
- Realize that emotions are a part of the workplace. Some emotions, in fact, are critical to business success. Enthusiasm, for example, can produce workers who are more productive. But employees who let their negative emotions run rampant can hurt themselves and the company.
- Determine the source of your feelings. Is the anger or distrust caused by a bad experience in the past rather than something that is happening now? Could it be stress? Talk about feelings-yours and the other party's. Try to identify what triggers you, understand your responses and develop behaviors that allow you to be more objective.
- Express your feelings in a non-confrontational manner. This can be done by using "I" messages, where you say, for instance, "I feel angry because..." rather than, "You made me angry by...." The first approach explains your feelings without accusing anyone else, while the second focuses blame on the opponent who is likely to become hostile or defensive in response.
- Acknowledge the other party's feelings as legitimate. Although you may feel differently about the situation, your opponent's feelings are real, and denying their existence or validity is likely to intensify them. Allowing feelings to be expressed and recognized helps release those feelings so you and the other party can move on to deal with the issue in dispute.
- Request a "time out." This allows for regrouping emotionally and for reflection. Walk away from the situation. Removing yourself will enable the other party to regain control and also give you time to think about how you can best handle the emotional outburst. But set a reasonable time limit when both parties agree to reconvene.
- Maintain a neutral body and voice. By keeping your body loose and your tone neutral, you are more likely to remain calm. You won't rile the other person, either.
- Focus on the positives. Rather than asking what you don't like about the environment, ask people what they do like about their work? What should we keep on doing, what

should we stop doing and what do we need to start doing? By setting the example of speaking about the positives first, others will feel valued for what goes right and can focus more easily on what may need to be changed.

- Be non-judgmental. Listen actively without interruption to what your colleague, boss or customer has to say without determining whether it is right or wrong, good or bad. If you feel you have to defend your side, be honest and alert the other party that you disagree or he or she has offended you.
- Turn off the heat. Don't let tensions reach the boiling point. Ask directly what is happening if you sense that something is going on. A major mistake in dealing with emotions is letting them grow to the degree that people are no longer talking to each other. Instead, they are screaming at each other or ignoring each other.
- Treat everyone fairly. Set up and follow clear policies and procedures. Having rules in place minimizes emotional conflicts.
- Offer help when it's needed. When a colleague has a difficult job before him or her and could use a hand, and you do nothing to help, he or she is likely to be annoyed. The stress of the task itself is made worse by the emotional feelings of abandonment.
- Ask workers what's on their minds. Particularly what can be done to make the workplace a more positive environment? A meeting that addresses workplace problems serves as an outlet for employees to share their complaints and come up with solutions. Use your acceptance of what they say as a way to get employees to open up more.

Om Sai Ram

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