

Managing emotions at work

Handling our emotions (particularly negative ones) at work is often seen as a measure of our professionalism.

FEATURE ARTICLE
By Evelyn Boon

We are emotional creatures. It is hard for us, as humans, not to be emotional.

While it is generally good to be in touch with our emotions and to not suppress them, there are situations when we must somehow manage our emotions especially well. That's notably the case at work.

Continued overleaf 



NEWS FLASH

Plants in workplace 'help boost productivity'

London - Adding plants to a 'lean' office could boost employee productivity by 15 per cent, said a report that examines, for the first time, the effects of workplace greenery in real offices. Over three experiments in commercial workplaces in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, researchers found that - contrary to what they called "widely accepted business philosophy" - sparse, streamlined desks do not lead to better output.

"Our research questions this widespread conviction that less is more," said co-author Professor Alex Haslam from The University of Queensland's School of Psychology. "Sometimes less is just less."



CET revamp to help employees make better career, learning choices



Singapore - Under the new Continuing Education and Training (CET) Masterplan unveiled in September, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) will be helping individuals make better informed career and learning choices, as well as getting employers to be actively involved in building and valuing their employees' skills.

Under the blueprint - which will support the work of the new tripartite committee led by Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam - WDA will work with lead agencies, employers and unions in various sectors to identify the specific manpower and skills required for each sector over a five-year period and spell out the measures needed to meet these requirements.

A sleep sweet spot

Finland - The most reliable workers are those who get seven to eight hours of sleep each night, a new study has showed.

The researchers found that the use of sick days was associated with the worker's sleep habits. Not surprisingly, they found that people who did not get enough sleep because of insomnia or other sleep problems were more likely to miss work. However, notably, getting a lot of extra sleep was also associated with missed work.

Japan eyes female workforce boost, but barriers remain



Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's appointment of a record number of women to his Cabinet highlights efforts to power the economy by boosting the female workforce - but he faces myriad challenges turning that vision into reality.

The move followed growing calls for Japan to make better use of its highly-educated but underemployed women, as a rapidly ageing population strains the public purse.

Tokyo wants to boost the ratio of women in senior positions to 30 per cent by 2020, up from 11 per cent now - one of the lowest rates in the world.

India optimistic on hiring plans for Dec. quarter: Manpower

India - Indian employers have strongest hiring plans compared to their global peers for the October-December quarter of this year on hopes of a speedy economic revival, says a ManpowerGroup report.

According to the Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, Indian employers anticipate a "vigorous" hiring pace for the next three months with as many as 46 per cent employers planning to increase their staff strength.

FEATURE ARTICLE | Continued

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Emotional outbursts at work could be directly due to work-related matters or to stressors from our personal life spilling into our work life. Handling our emotions (particularly negative ones) at work is often seen as a measure of our professionalism.

According to a 1997 study done by Professor Cynthia Fisher from Bond University, School of Business, the most common negative emotions experienced at work are: frustration, worry, anger, dislike and unhappiness.

Do any of these emotions seem familiar to you? You may experience other, less common, negative emotions that will also leave you feeling stressed.

From a psychologist's standpoint, it is never good to repress or suppress emotions, positive or negative. However, our emotions must be managed to allow us to function in various situations.

What are some of the strategies we can use to cope with negative emotions? Here are 10 methods that may help:

1. Compartmentalisation (when negative emotions from home affect your work)

Try to leave personal matters and issues at home. When you commute to work, use that time to tell your mind to let them go.

For example, if you are taking the MRT/bus/driving, at each station/bus stop/traffic stop, mentally ask the offending person to get off or "push" the stressor out.

Some find it helpful to mentally "store/lock up" the issue in a box for the time being.

You can also compartmentalise work-related stressors so that your emotions at work don't spill over into your personal life.

2. Deep Breathing and Relaxation Techniques

This will help with emotions like anxiety, worry, frustration and anger.

Take deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly until you calm down. Count to 10 slowly. You can take a walk or listen to some relaxing music to cool down. Talk to someone who can help you calm down.



3. The 10-Second Rule

This is especially helpful if you are feeling angry, frustrated or even irate.

If you feel your temper rising, try and count to 10 to re-compose yourself. If possible, excuse yourself from the situation to get some distance, but be sure to reassure the other party that you will be back to deal with the matter.

4. Clarify

It is good to clarify before reacting, in the event that it is a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication.

5. Blast Your Anger Through Exercise

Instead of losing your cool, plan on hitting the treadmill or going to a kick-boxing class to let the anger out of your system.

Exercise is also a good way to get a solid dose of mood-enhancing endorphins. In addition, exercise will help to release any physical tension in your body.

6. Never Reply or Make a Decision When Angry

In this day of instant communication, it's easy to just shoot off an email or text message that you may regret later.

Never let your anger or unhappiness cloud your judgement. Hold off all communication while you are still angry. You can type it first, but save it as a draft and sleep on it for a day. Re-read it the next day or even let someone you trust take a look at it before you send it.

7. Know Your Triggers

It helps when you are able to recognise what upsets or angers you.

This way, you can prepare yourself to remain calm and plan your reaction should the situation recur.

You may even be able to anticipate the other party's reaction.

8. Be Respectful

Treat your colleagues the same way you would like to be treated yourself.

If the person is rude, there's no need to reciprocate. We can stay gracious and just be firm and assertive, without being aggressive. Often, rude people will mellow if they don't get a reaction from you and realise that they are the only ones shouting in the room.

9. Apologise for any Emotional Outbursts

Sometimes our emotions do get the better of us.

If you do have an emotional outburst, apologise immediately to the person and perhaps to those around you who have heard it.

You need not explain yourself or be defensive. Just a simple "I am sorry. I reacted badly," would make a difference.

10. Never Take Your Negative Emotions Home

It is good practice to let go of any anger, frustration and unhappiness at the end of every workday.

Harbouring negative emotions allows them to fester like mould, bringing you to a breaking point. So it's best to empty the emotional "trash can" on a daily basis, to prevent being overwhelmed.

You can use the compartmentalisation method mentioned above, or you can plan to engage in enjoyable activities after work with your friends and family.

