Managing your emotions as a leader

Most people have worked for the stereotypically emotional boss—one who flies off the handle and turns up the vocal volume when provoked by stress or uncertainty. In contrast, an effective manager stays in relative control, calmly assessing the situation and identifying an appropriate path forward.

To avoid unloading irritation or anger on your staff, try employing the skills of emotional intelligence.

• Envision your behavior’s impact on team members. Remember that a leader’s short outburst of negativity can fuel an enduring environment of destabilizing stress amidst staff.

• Pause and gain control before responding to a stressful event. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and—consistent with the practice of mindfulness—experience your negative thoughts without judging or acting on them.

• While you don’t want to suppress all emotions, you can consciously choose which emotions are appropriate to display in a given situation. Ask yourself if showing this emotion will help you achieve your desired objective.

• Take your time in reacting, while considering all sides of a dispute. This helps you respond with a problem solving mindset rather than an emotional one.

Understand and motivate others

✓ You’ll boost employees’ engagement if you include them in major decisions. Share high-level organizational developments and encourage staff questions and feedback.

✓ Provide leadership learning experiences. Allow individual team members to attend important meetings, cross-functional work groups, or meetings where they represent the department in your absence.

✓ Every employee wants to feel their supervisor values them. You can inspire the loyalty and productivity of your team by offering generous praise when it’s earned.

Get to know each of your team members personally. Find out what truly motivates them. Ask about their career goals and create a performance development plan that helps them get there.
Maintaining emotional intelligence amidst stress

Allowing stress to consume you and degrade your communication with others can damage employee motivation, concentration and productivity.

- When a stressful situation arises, take some deep breaths, strive to understand the sources of frustration or anxiety, and closely examine those sources before responding.
- Remaining calm and in control is a hallmark of a strong leader; keeping your emotions in check minimizes not only your stress but that of your team.
- Learning effective emotional management can be challenging at first but becomes more natural with practice and self-reflection.

- Stay connected to trusted work peers/colleagues to help you navigate challenges. This helps you feel less isolated and can provide valuable advice for dealing with problems.
- Keeping stress in check helps your attention return to being nimble and focused, your mind flexible, and your body more relaxed. Optimal performance results from a state of relaxed alertness.

Resolving conflicts intelligently

Have a strategy

Uncomfortable disagreements, misunderstandings and resentments can sometimes poison the work environment and impede productivity. However, it’s important to address conflicts early on so they don’t fester and lead to increased tension and work disruption. Long-simmering misunderstandings can be addressed and resolved, leading to better long-term team cohesion.

Establish a safe forum

Let the team know that you expect a respectful meeting environment where disagreement is expressed honestly and no one is attacked personally. If conflicts become personal or emotional, interrupt the process. Remind team members to focus on resolving work issues, not assigning blame to others or “winning” a battle.

Formulate and monitor solutions

Encourage group brainstorming for potential solutions to a conflict. Don’t judge individuals’ ideas and suggestions. Instead, evaluate, compare and synthesize different options to formulate a compromise solution that reasonably meets everyone’s needs. Upon identifying an agreed-upon solution, document it and let everyone know that you’ll be tracking its effectiveness.


Webinar—Join a webinar for leaders and HR representatives focusing on how you and your EAP can build a more engaged workforce on Wednesday, Dec. 6: EAP’s Impact on Employee Engagement. Register here.