

LEADERSHIP TIPS

MANAGING EMOTIONS

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by Marilyn Manning

From Negative Emotions to Positive Value

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone came to work with a positive attitude? Most of us are uncomfortable with most forms of negative attitudes or emotions. We find ourselves looking the other way, avoiding the person or situation, or even giving subtle hints, hoping the person will magically change.

Nevertheless, as managers, we usually face some unpleasant attitude or emotion most every day. We may see a sudden outburst of yelling, someone breaking down to cry, a person withdrawing and not participating, one showing signs of boredom or apathy, or a jealous worker who puts down other's ideas and input.

Stress levels are at an all time high in today's world. Negative attitudes and emotions have almost become the norm as we try to cope with constant change, challenges and pressures. We are expected to have immediate solutions: do more with less, and do it faster. Emotions run high.

However, emotions well managed can serve as accurate indicators of unmet needs. The ability to read the emotional signals and respond appropriately is an important skill.

Types of negative emotions:

There are both primary and

secondary emotions. Primary emotions are those that describe unmet needs. These become secondary emotions when the need is not met. For example, your employee might feel overwhelmed by recent changes. The primary emotion, feeling overwhelmed, is a reaction to the unmet need to be in a stable group and feel security. But, when these needs are not discussed and go unmet, other emotions like fear, anxiety or even depression can follow. Those are called secondary or reaction emotions.

Four Step Approach:

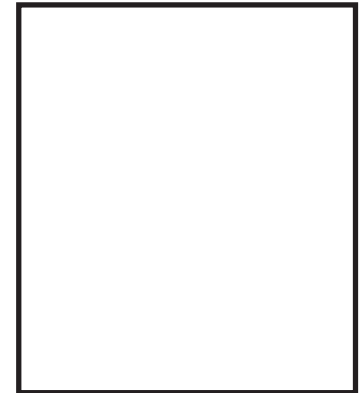
What follows is a four-step approach to dealing with negative emotions and attitudes.

One: Assess

Assess the employee's emotional state by using one-on-ones, style assessments, & surveys. Make sure to include all who are affected.

In your one-on-ones, you may want to ask the following questions:

1. How are you feeling?
2. What are you experiencing about this situation?
3. Are you uncomfortable with these feelings, emotions?
4. How would you prefer to feel?
5. How else is this impacting you?
6. What is one step I could help you take?
7. If you took some action, what could be the risk or down side?



Two: Plan and prepare for your approach.

Consider various strategies. If you plan a meeting, carefully pick a neutral setting. Decide how you will collect your data. Identify if you need to have some individual feedback sessions before meeting with any groups.

Ask if you have the right skills to do the appropriate individual coaching or do you need to engage a third party coach. Think about requesting a 360' assessment or other measurements that can provide relevant data about the employee.

Three: The Sessions

In your sessions, use the basics of good meeting management. Discuss and set clear ground rules, an agenda, outcomes and agreements. You may need to work with the individual or group to set boundaries so that they can get through an emotional time and get back on track.

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Dr. Marilyn Manning CSP, CMC
945 Mountain View Avenue
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Four: Follow-up and Evaluation

Discuss the learnings. How have things improved? What would you do differently next time emotions run high? How will you reinforcement any of the positive changes? What do you plan in case of slippage? What will be the process for getting help at the early stages of negative emotions?

Different Strokes:

People have a wide range of emotional reactions to situations. One who has a **condescending and arrogant style** may be emotionally fueled by jealousy, insecurity, anger, resentment, or even guilt. As you apply the steps, keep in mind that he or she has a need for security and recognition.

Someone who seems **on the edge** and **very volatile** might be emotionally fueled by fear, anger, hurt, grief, or worry. Their secondary emotion may be fear. They have a strong need for safety and a safe haven. One who is **disengaged** and a **non-participant** could be fueled by loss, nega-

tive change, grief, or anxiety. They may be feeling rejected with a strong need for acceptance.

Creating positive value from negative emotions

Keep in mind that emotions can help us communicate. Sometimes, we don't know what we are really feeling, so by expressing or encouraging our employees to express, we open up the door to communication. Emotions can provide a common ground. A sense of team or unity can be the outcome of confronting emo-

tions positively in a group setting. It helps to know what others are expecting and feeling.

Emotions can alert us and give us useful information. They can help build relationships and honor diversity when we respect our different reactions. Finally, emotions can help signal us to get back into balance. By using good techniques and skills, we can help our employees to practice letting go, to see both sides of issues, and to have the opportunity to grow and develop. As managers and leaders, we also hone our skills as we learn to deal with negative emotions and attitudes.

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