Mastering Emotional Reactions in the Workplace

Tools for Positive Engagement

Developing your emotional intelligence will allow you to explore new depths of understanding in yourself and others.
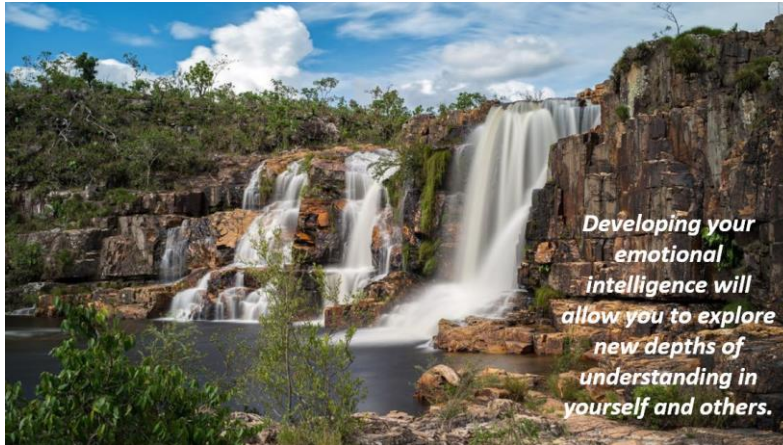
This is the first of a three-part series.

In the fast-paced world of work, emotions can often run high. Whether it's dealing with challenging colleagues, navigating difficult situations with subordinates, interacting with demanding bosses, or collaborating with diverse teams, emotions are an inherent part of your workplace experiences. While you can't always control how you feel in a given moment, you can certainly control how you react to those feelings. By consciously managing your emotional reactions, you can foster positive relationships and create a harmonious work environment.

Justin Bariso is an outstanding source for information and training on emotional intelligence. On EQApplied.com Justin offers a weekly newsletter, articles, and reasonably priced training. In the first of two parts recently, he introduced a great visual metaphor for practicing emotional intelligence. It immediately resonated with me conceptually, but at another level, it sparked specific instances in my leadership coaching where assessment of emotional intelligence has been a major factor.

An Emotional Intelligence Media Player

Just like a media player enhances your enjoyment of a favorite movie or song, the media player methods can enhance your ability to handle emotions constructively in the workplace. Let's explore the tools of the media player and how they can be applied.

Volume Control: Cultivating Calm Communication

Your tone and demeanor greatly influence the responses you receive from others. If you approach a conversation with aggression or anger, it's likely to escalate in a similar manner. However, speaking calmly and rationally tends to elicit a similar response from your communication partners. When engaged in a discussion that begins to escalate, make a conscious effort to "dial it back."

If you experiment with this -- *and initially you'll likely realize that just a few seconds of silence is hard to do* – but also that it is instantly noticeable by others. This is a skill that takes practice – and awareness.

- When addressing a performance issue with a subordinate, using a calm and empathetic tone can help create a conducive environment for discussion. By speaking softly and attentively, you encourage the employee to share their perspective and collaborate on finding a solution.

- During a heated team discussion where multiple opinions clash, be mindful of your volume control. Lower your voice and maintain a respectful tone to foster a more collaborative atmosphere. Others are likely to follow suit, leading to a more constructive and inclusive conversation.

A study found that the most important factor to predict **WHETHER OR NOT** a person **TOOK THE LEAD WITHIN HIS OR HER TEAM** was an individual's

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Pause Button: Taking Time to Reflect

▌▌ In the heat of the moment, it's easy to get carried away by your emotions and say or do things you may regret later. The pause button allows you to stop, take a breath, and reflect before responding.

- During a team meeting, if a colleague makes a comment that triggers a strong emotional response, hit the pause button. Instead of reacting impulsively, take a moment to gather your thoughts and consider the best way to respond constructively and respectfully.

- When receiving critical feedback from a supervisor, it's natural to feel defensive. Instead of immediately defending yourself, hit pause. Take a step back, process the feedback objectively, and then respond with a composed and open-minded attitude.

Mute: Listening Instead of Reacting

🔇 In situations where leaving the interaction is not an option, you may need to put yourselves on "Mute." This means refraining from speaking and allowing the other person to express their feelings.

Using the mute button is effective because trying to share your perspective when the other person is emotional often exacerbates the situation. By letting the other person freely express themselves, you create a space for them to release their emotions.

- If a team member becomes emotional and begins venting their frustrations during a meeting, put yourself on "Mute." Allow them to express their concerns without interruption or judgment. By giving them the space to be heard, you demonstrate empathy and a willingness to understand their perspective.

- In a conflict with a colleague, if you feel your emotions rising and realize that engaging in further argument won't be productive, put yourself on "Mute." Temporarily withhold your own viewpoint and focus on actively listening to their side of the story. This creates an opportunity for open dialogue and potential resolution.

Record: Active Listening for Understanding

Recording, in the context of the media player approach, refers to concentrated listening with the intent to understand the other person's perspective. It involves setting aside your own preconceptions and truly immersing yourselves in their point of view.

Through active listening, you can uncover insights you may have missed before and identify any fundamental misunderstandings that need clarification.

- When providing performance feedback to an employee, practice recording. Instead of assuming you know the reasons behind their behavior, actively listen to their explanations. This allows you to gain insight into their challenges, motivations, and perspectives, enabling you to provide targeted support and guidance.

- In a cross-functional team meeting where there are different opinions on a project approach, use recording to understand various perspectives. Listen attentively to each team member's reasoning and concerns. By doing so, you can identify common ground, address misunderstandings, and facilitate a collaborative decision-making process.

By incorporating these four media player tools into your workplace interactions, you can cultivate a more positive and productive environment. You can foster better communication, understanding, and collaboration among colleagues, subordinates, bosses, and teams. Remember, emotions are a natural part of the human experience, and by refining your responses, you can cultivate stronger connections and foster harmonious relationships.