

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

WHEN EMOTIONS RUN HIGH AT WORK

Deadlines. That word alone is enough to strike us with fear and frustration. The modern workplace revolves around deadlines. Emotions can run high, and yet, ideally, emotions should be kept separate from the workplace to ensure minimum politics, undue competition and petty backstabbing. So what role does emotion-play in your work, and how can we ensure that the environment does not become poisoned by unnecessary emotion?

Negative emotions at work are inevitable; given that we all have to rely on others to get work done, do more with less resources and to ensure targets are met. Emotions, to many employers, should be left at the door of the workplace, or, better still, kept locked up at home. But we are all human, and we spend most of our daily hours at work, so like it or not, emotions at work are here to stay, so we need to learn the causes of negative emotions and to ensure they do not snowball amongst other staff.

Let us not forget that the workplace can also generate many positive emotions, with colleagues responsible for laughter and fun and working in an environment that recognizes your efforts can trigger enthusiasm and pride.

So the opposite- negative emotions- are often generated by not being able to work professionally due to constant interruption, change, and lack of effective processes and procedures. Negative emotions can arise when you do not identify with your employers goals, or feel they do not have your best interests at heart. When negative vibes and atmospheres at work go ignored, are not taken seriously or dealt with sensitively, then those emotions can turn poisonous, and will affect individual, team and eventually the whole organizations performance. Side effects could include high staff turnover, illness, lack of enthusiasm or creativity and low performance amongst staff.

A University of British Columbia professor, Peter Frost, when exploring the main reasons of staff dissatisfaction, identified these key themes: Staff feel let down when having to work with incompetent colleagues or superiors; suffer in environments of insensitivity where no empathy is shown; do not perform well with constant intrusion, where others are trying to constantly control them and they are let down by lack of clear policies and practices in the organization as a whole.

Often, there are natural 'counselors' that staff turn to within the workplace to share grievances. However, these informal counselors are often not within the HR Department, and therefore not really trained to follow up or respond to the negative feedback. Such informal counselors are normally team members, secretaries or line managers that work alongside the member of staff who is feeling low, and therefore such negative emotions could be just passed along. That said, these counselors play an important role in trying to refocus people back on to the work at hand. These staff members often go unrecognized for their efforts, and organizations should really try to harness their skills with mentoring/counseling or coaching skills.

So how can you ensure negative emotions do not take over your workplace, escalating into a gossip, where people's characters are assassinated or generalized into derogatory classifications? Firstly, attention should be paid to emotions amongst the team, and train yourself to pick up on the negative vibes, but not contribute to them. You should rely on actively listening to what colleagues; team members, clients and managers have got to say on how they see the workplace.

If you feel someone is just 'moaning', try to put yourself into their shoes and ask how you would react or what sort of advise you would most like to hear from them if the situation was reversed. Then discuss with HR or your line managers how adequate support or training could be given to the informal counselors to whom disgruntled staff seem to turn. Organizations should also realize that the constant change culture in the modern workplace breeds emotion

and negativity, and special care needs to be given to how change is managed, implemented and communicated to all levels.

When following this common sense, hopefully the workplace will include only the positives and we can all look forward to work everyday.

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