

Emotional Contagion

When we interact with others, we often pick up on their emotional cues, and these emotions can influence our own emotional states. This phenomenon is known as emotional contagion.

If we notice someone is displaying an emotion, such as happiness or sadness, we can unconsciously mimic their expression, which leads us to take on that emotional state.

Leaders need to observe and be aware of their employee's emotions, which we discuss in empathy. And the reverse is true. Employees closely watch their boss's actions, behaviors, voice tone, and other cues to determine their boss's mood, or emotional state. Employees can then take on those emotions.

In effect, you are transferring your emotions to your employees. If you are stressed or anxious, your employees will pick up on that state, which can increase their stress and anxiety.

Self-regulation – thinking before acting

Self-Management.

Emotional agility – don't suppress emotions, but rather approach them in a mindful ability, value-driven, productive way --- ability to manage one's thoughts and emotions.

Studies prove emotional agility helps alleviate stress, reduce errors, become more innovative, and improve job performance. Multiple studies – University of London professor Frank Bond and others...

Emotional agility refers to the ability to navigate and adapt to one's own emotions effectively. It involves being aware of and accepting one's emotions, understanding their underlying causes, and choosing how to respond in a way that aligns with one's values and goals. Emotional agility emphasizes flexibility, resilience, and the ability to use emotions as a guide for productive action.

By cultivating emotional agility, individuals can navigate the ups and downs of life more effectively, make choices aligned with their values, and respond to challenges with resilience and authenticity. It promotes emotional well-being,

enhances relationships, and supports personal and professional growth.

Effective self-management empowers you to take control of tense situations, react favorably to change and equip you to take the initiative to positively influence the discussion or situation to achieve your personal goals and the organization's objectives.

Self-regulation at work refers to the ability to manage and control one's own thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behaviors in order to achieve desired outcomes and maintain professionalism. It involves maintaining composure, staying focused, and making thoughtful decisions even in challenging or high-pressure situations. Self-regulation is crucial for maintaining productivity, interpersonal relationships, and overall work performance.

Emotion Regulation: Learn to recognize and manage your emotions effectively. When faced with challenging situations, take a moment to acknowledge your emotions, but avoid impulsive reactions. Use techniques like reframing, positive self-talk, or seeking support to regulate and channel your emotions constructively.

ACT – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (starts on page 65) Might be good for Self-awareness individual contributor content....

Recognize your patterns – when you've been hooked by your thoughts and feelings

Label your thoughts and emotions

Accept them

Act on your values

Compassion and curiosity outweigh reprimanding others.

(For self-management)

but they are somehow able to suspend judgment and may even be able to use the moment to do a bit of coaching

The more compassionate response will get you more powerful results – according to research

First, compassion and curiosity increase employee loyalty and trust. Research has shown that feelings of warmth and positive relationships at work have a greater say over an employee's loyalty than the size of his or her paycheck.¹ In particular, a study by Jonathan Haidt of New York University shows that

the more employees look up to their leaders and are moved by their compassion or kindness (a state he terms “elevation”), the more loyal they become to him or her.²

If people have fear and anxiety, we know from neuroscience that their threat response is engaged, and their cognitive control is impacted. As a consequence, their productivity and creativity diminish.”

Employees worry about the consequences of making a mistake.

However, when as a leader you express negative emotions like anger, your employees actually view you as less effective.¹⁰ Conversely, being likable and projecting warmth—not toughness—gives leaders a distinct advantage, as Amy Cuddy of Harvard Business School has shown.¹¹

1. Take a moment. Doty explains that the first thing to do is to get a handle on your own emotions—anger, frustration, or whatever the case may be. “You have to take a step back and control your own emotional response, because if you act out of emotional engagement, you are not thoughtful about your approach to the problem. By stepping back and taking a period of time to reflect, you enter a mental state that allows for a more thoughtful, reasonable, and discerned response.” Practicing meditation can help improve your self-awareness and emotional control.¹²

Try to see the situation from your employees view

The ability to perspective-take is a valuable one. Studies have shown that it helps you see aspects of the situation you may not have noticed and leads to better results in interactions and negotiations.¹⁴

And because positions of power tend to lower our natural inclination for empathy, it is particularly important that managers have the self-awareness to make sure they practice seeing situations from their employee’s perspective.¹⁵

Forgive. Empathy, of course, helps you forgive. Forgiveness not only strengthens your relationship with your employee by promoting loyalty, it turns out that it is also good for you. Whereas carrying a grudge is bad for your heart (blood pressure and heart rate both go up), forgiveness lowers both your

blood pressure and that of the person you're forgiving.
¹⁶ Other studies show that forgiveness makes you happier and more satisfied with life, significantly reducing stress and negative emotions.¹⁷

Emotions are contagious?

The behaviors, actions, and comments of those in positions that lead others are more closely scrutinized. So it is even more important for leaders to be aware of and understand how they show up at work.

There are a lot of labels for staying calm, whether the source is stress or someone's comments, such as emotional intelligence, grit, resilience. It is really about emotional management or stability. It starts by being aware of what can trigger emotions that can negatively impact our performance.

One of the oldest findings in modern psychology is that a moderate amount of pressure can actually improve performance. The arousal of pressure balanced with an amount that does not tip into negativity, which distracts our focus and attention, lowering our confidence and increasing our stress and anxiety.

Look at our emotions through 2 lenses

- Impact on our employees
- Trigger sources

Let's talk about pressure situation first.

To manage pressure and continue to perform well in our high-pressure times, we need to know our threshold between positive stress and when our stress level tips over to a negative level.

We all handle stress in our unique ways, so one person's stress level will vary from another. The best way to know how we perform under pressure is to get feedback.

(Trusted colleagues, family, or friends.) Ask for specific situations so you can try to recall how much pressure you felt during time. (This is an exercise we recommend you practice, so these questions included for you.)

- Do you think I perform well under pressure?
- Do I look nervous or tense in high-stakes situations?
- Do you see my behaviors change when I'm under calm or high-pressure situations?

- Do I generally seem calm and composed to you?

We talk a lot about how feedback is a gift at Brize. It is most helpful when it is either something we did not know and needed to hear rather than wanted to hear. Learning something about ourself is the only way to change and grow.

This information will help you start to identify physical changes that indicate your pressure level is rising and if/when it might tip into negative territory.

Now start to identify situations that increase your feeling of pressure and stress levels. High workloads, pending deadlines? Failing to meet your social or family responsibilities? Do relationship (partner, parents, children, friend) situations weigh on you? Maybe your diet is negatively impacting your mood. Maybe you can remain calm at work but not at home.

The good news is we can learn to self-manage in pressure to avoid tipping to the negative. Building self-management requires:

- Planning
- Prioritizing
- Picking our battles
- Pushing outside our comfort zone

As with developing any skill, practice is critical to our performance and reducing anxiety. As a matter of fact, our stronger performance during high-pressure times is due to lower stress and anxiety. Virtuous circle, yes. High anxiety negatively impacts our performance, so lowering it, removes the potential of negative impacts. (Improves our performance.)

If deadlines stress you out, get ahead of them. Write out a plan for how and when you'll reach each milestone to completing the task ahead of the deadline.

If people are a source of your stress, look at new ways you can interact with them – that is not avoidance. You may need to get to know them better as a human to help reduce why they may be a source of anxiety.

The pressure we feel at any given moment is largely caused by our own thoughts, ideas, and interpretation of things. This is why two different people will have different anxiety levels during the same experience.

Stress and anxiety, like other emotions, happiness, sadness, anger, is mostly a state of mind. When it shows up unexpectedly, try to change where your mind is focusing. Focus on others, not yourself, look for enjoyment in the situation, or focus on switching from the

anxiety emotion to a positive emotion. Again, this switch requires practice.

In the moment, attempting to suppress your emotions can negatively impact how you react. It is okay to say I need a moment to <insert something, take a breath, think about what was just said. If in a job interview, admit you are a bit nervous given your excitement for the potential opportunity.)

Remember, a certain amount of anxiety helps us to perform better in high-pressure situations, so don't attempt to remove all stress. You'll want the optimal level to help you activate competitive, favorable emotions. If you don't feel some pressure, you probably aren't aiming high-enough in your goals.

We typically have little control over who we need to work with to get our job done at work. This lack of control can create a need to build relationships with individuals we don't mesh with very well. We may not like that person, or they can seem to "push our buttons." They may cause what is referred to as an emotional trigger in us.

We need to remember that everyone (including you) brings baggage to work. Whether conscious or subconscious, this baggage can harm our working relationships, especially when it causes an emotional trigger that can lead us to undesirable behaviors.

We are typically emotionally triggered when we feel someone does not respect the strengths we believe make us unique. We might feel a lack of mutual respect, not valued, or feeling as though we are not needed. Our emotional reaction is typically anger or fear. And these triggers can activate in an instant, almost like we have lost control of our feelings and thoughts. If you have ever felt like you are having an out-of-body experience, watching yourself behave in a less than desirable way, wanting to stop, but you can't, you can probably relate.

These reactions can be harmful to a relationship if we react in a hurtful or disrespectful way towards others, especially if we repeatedly react this way. Identifying our emotional triggers and quickly de-triggering is critical to cultivating strong working relationships.

If we behave in a less than desirable way, those individuals with whom we have invested time building strong relationships will know this behavior is out of character or may recognize what is impacting our reaction and will be more understanding of our behaviors.

Individuals who do not know us well may not understand our behavior is out of character, which can lead to inaccurate perceptions of the type of person we are more broadly.

Some of the most common emotional triggers include a feeling of a lack of:

- Acceptance

- Being Understood
- Attention
- Respect
- Being Needed
- Balance
- New Challenges
- Predictability
- Being Liked
- Being Valued
- Being Treated Fairly
- Consistency
- Included
- Autonomy

We need to understand how what others say or behave can trigger an emotional response in us to remain productive at work.

We are not going to investigate the underlying reasons for an emotional trigger here, which are typically based on our prior experiences.

Instead, we want to focus on learning to recognize when we are triggered and how to control our behaviors to avoid negatively impacting our working relationships.

To recognize we have been emotionally triggered, we need to pay attention to our physical changes when we become agitated or react to a situation in an unexpected way.

We respond physically first when emotionally triggered, so attempt to identify where you acknowledge negative emotions in your body.

The most common physical reactions to emotional triggers include a stiffening in the neck, shoulders, jaw, throat, chest; or you may feel your heart start to race, you may find yourself sitting or standing up straight as if to do battle, or you may even feel short of breath.

As you become more aware of these physical changes, you will immediately recognize when you have been triggered, and you will be able to effectively self-manage your response. You will be able to de-trigger and shift to a positive emotional state to respond in an even manner, not emotionally.

De-triggering Exercise

It is not always easy to de-trigger, so recognize it will take practice, and be kind to yourself if you slip. When you feel triggered, attempt to activate this response.

- **Breathe:** This might sound simplistic, but it is powerful. Research shows that different emotions are associated with different forms of breathing. Our breathing becomes irregular, short, and fast when we feel anxious or angry. When we feel joy or are relaxed, our breathing is more regular, deep, and slow. We can control our emotions by aligning our breathing patterns with the emotions we want to display. So to calm yourself, breathe deeply.
- **Next, detach:** Attempt to clear your mind of all thoughts. This can be difficult, but shifting your thoughts to a peaceful place for a minute or two will help calm your emotions. Think about the beach, the mountains, reading a book, riding a bike, meditating, anything you find calming.
- **Center your thoughts:** Focus your awareness on your body's core area and concentrate on your breathing. Continue to breathe deeply and focus on your body's reaction to the air coming in and out of your lungs. This is a distraction technique to help you de-trigger further. Keep your focus on your body movement until you can.....
- **Think Clearly:** Consider if you need to respond. Just because you have had an emotional reaction does not mean you need to defend yourself. Remember, others may not know why you become defensive. They don't know your emotional triggers, so our charged response may surprise others.

If a response is needed, compose a calm one. Attempt to control the tone of your voice and choose words that are non-emotional, defensive, or hurtful. Again, this is not an easy process. But try to respond in a way that displays the type of person you want to be - for example, a levelheaded individual who is a problem solver who does not create emotional conflict.

Implementing this de-triggering process will allow you to develop a fact-based response, not an emotional one. Then you will be able to share these facts effectively so that others can consider your data-supported opinion.

It is important to remember you may not like a colleague. But your interactions need to be positive to achieve your personal and company goals. De-triggering will allow you to maintain positive relationships even with co-workers who may "push your buttons."

Also, be kind. It is always easier to be kind or empathetic toward people we like because we give them the benefit of the doubt, even if they misbehave. We naturally assume they are dealing with something that is impacting their behavior. Without a strong foundational relationship, you most likely will not give the individual you have a weak relationship with the benefit of the doubt. And you may even react in a less than desirable way towards this person. To avoid such a reaction, adjust your approach and mindset towards them. Compliment them

on a job well done in some way. Maybe they had a great idea or gave an excellent presentation. Acknowledge their accomplishments. Or offer to help them complete a project. These actions will demonstrate your commitment to strengthening your relationship.