

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONS



SAVE YOURSELF FROM HEADACHES BY LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND THE EFFECTS OF EMOTION

By **JUSTIN OOI**
 editor@leaderonomics.com

HAVE you heard the song *Sunday Bloody Sunday* by U2? Sometimes, it feels more like “Monday Bloody Monday” at the start of certain weeks at work.

Conversely, have you ever had an extremely busy workday but felt strangely energised at the end of it? Situations are often neutral, but our perceptions and emotions towards them seldom are.

This year we’re seeing more budget cuts, voluntary separation schemes and organisation restructuring due to the economic climate. The resulting stress can affect our emotions and, in turn, our productivity.

HOW DO EMOTIONS AFFECT OUR WORK PERFORMANCE?

Happy workers are productive workers. A recent study by economists at the University of Warwick found that happiness led to a 12% spike in productivity. Happy employees feel motivated to do more and raise the quality of their work.

Based on a study conducted in 1997 by Bond University professor of management Cynthia Fisher, there are some common emotions at work shown to shape performance (see **Table 1**).

Studies have shown that dissatisfied employees suffer from more physical ailments ranging from headaches, gastritis, high blood pressure and other health issues which affect productivity.

A friend of mine, who is a high-achiever, used to work more than 12 hours per day at an international consultancy firm. As a result, he suffered from bouts of debilitating migraines.

It didn’t help that his superiors were often more concerned about “Who’s fault is it?” rather than “How to solve it?” when facing hiccups.

Since medication did not relieve the migraines, my friend’s neurologist sent him for a brain MRI which provided inconclusive results.

After securing a new job that suited him better and provided a healthier work-life balance, his migraines somehow disappeared. Surprise, surprise!

HOW DO OUR EMOTIONS IMPACT OTHERS?

Many of us spend more waking hours daily with colleagues than family members. Handling negative emotions at work can be a delicate affair.

At home, if you get into a heated disagreement, you might choose to storm out of the house, sulk in your room or hug and make up later.

In a workplace disagreement, it’s seldom advisable to walk out of the meeting, go sulk in your office, or hug your colleague as an apology.

Just like any happy (or unhappy) family, our emotions have an infectious impact on those around us at work.

It’s quite easy to add to the doom and gloom by swapping tales daily during lunch on:

- How my boss snapped at me today during a presentation.
- Which colleague is backstabbing which.
- Crazy demands by clients.
- (Insert other complaints of the day.)

Don’t get me wrong, letting off some steam is healthy. What’s even better is



+ POSITIVE	- NEGATIVE
<p>Confidence: <i>I’ve handled projects like these successfully.</i></p>	<p>Worry: <i>How can I achieve these sky-high revenue targets?</i></p>
<p>Satisfaction: <i>My boss trusts me.</i></p>	<p>Frustration: <i>My boss micromanages me.</i></p>
<p>Calmness: <i>We can complete this urgent task together.</i></p>	<p>Anger: <i>Others are dumping work on me.</i></p>
<p>Excitement: <i>We’re launching a new product.</i></p>	<p>Dislike: <i>I hate these endless reports.</i></p>
<p>Joy: <i>I finally got that promotion!</i></p>	<p>Disappointment: <i>I didn’t get that promotion!</i></p>

Table 1

if we have encouraging colleagues, who can help analyse situations objectively and recommend solutions instead.

- Why did the boss snap at me? What details does he want to see during such presentations?
- Who cares about backstabbers? Just be wise and watch your back.
- Understand why the client needs to stock/report so urgently. How can we build contingency to prevent such high-pressure situation?

If you don’t have too many positive colleagues, try being one yourself. You’ll be surprised how many colleagues – and yes, even bosses – spring to life when someone encourages them to press on.

I was managing two major back-to-back publicity events towards the end of last year. I was feeling burnt out as the next month involved another major event involving over 300 attendees.

The problem was we hadn’t fully secured the necessary budget and other crucial details. My youngest staff could see I was very troubled and told me privately, “Justin, chill. You led us through those two tough campaigns successfully. I’m sure we can make this one work too.”

And we did. I will certainly remember that piece of encouragement for years to come.

If your workplace is filled with rainbows and where everyone holds hands

while singing *Kumbaya*, I doubt you need any further solutions.

WORKPLACE EMOTIONAL HEALTH CHECK-UP

For those who work in the real world, here are some practical suggestions to become emotionally healthy in the workplace:

1 EVALUATE

If you’re worried, panicking or angry, stop for a minute or two to think. Why am I feeling this way?

Is it worth the angst? Are there any other actions or ways to communicate that would be less stressful but still achieve the goal?

It’s during such stressful moments when we don’t seem to have a minute to spare, that it’s essential to interrupt our emotionally-charged state of mind with rational solutions instead. Writing down those solutions may save us from hours or days of headaches later on.

2 PRIORITISE

In this era of multitasking (read: organised chaos), there are more than a dozen tasks to complete in each day. Learn to differentiate what’s urgent versus what’s important.

Personally, I pick about three “must-dos” to complete for the day and focus my energy on them.

The rest, I consider a bonus if I complete them too. The sky usually doesn’t fall despite having some leftover tasks.

3 ASSERT YOURSELF

Some unhappy souls constantly get bullied at work because others know they can get away with it.

Being assertive is not about being rude but asking others to be reasonable.

For example, “Yes, I can help edit your presentation, but I would appreciate that you prepare your initial draft first.”

4 CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

An outspoken senior colleague once declared as he stormed out of our boss’s office, “I won the argument, but I lost the war.”

We should stick with our principles. But if it’s just minor details, it’s best to compromise.

It’s wiser to save your cards for bigger matters such as negotiating annual KPIs (key performance indicators), budgets, pay raise, etc.

5 FORGIVE OTHERS

People sometimes say or do things at work which anger or frustrate us. It may be hard to forgive, especially if the offence was done intentionally or in an underhanded manner.

Don’t be a doormat; confront the offender in the most professional manner possible.

But whatever the outcome, do yourself a favour and forgive others. Why? As a famous phrase goes: “Unforgiveness is as effective as drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”

Let toxic grudges go and give cheers to your emotional health instead.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These suggestions are based on the concept that emotions are by-products of our thoughts. It’s true that emotions are hard to control at times but we can change the way we think, and thus manage our emotions which influence our job performance and satisfaction.

Since there’s no such thing as a perfect company, decide what you can do today to make your office a happier place.

If you do find a perfect company, please don’t join it, as it would no longer be perfect.

It’s healthy to take your job seriously, but don’t take yourself too seriously – life really is too short.

■ Justin Ooi has over 13 years of experience in corporate communications and marketing. His professional experience provides him with insights on building brands and reputation through strategic engagement with critical stakeholders. To connect with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com