

Setting the Tone at Work: Tips for managers and teams on improving mood

Being aware of your emotions, especially through the ups and downs you experience at work, naming them, and handling them in a way that's healthy and consistent are key to your success. Here are some tips:

Watch your body language. Research has shown that when people are trying to read someone's mood, they rely heavily on that person's body language for cues. Posture, gestures, and facial expressions send important signals to others. For example, avoid tense, tight body postures or negative gestures like rolling your eyes. Make an effort to avoid imitating someone's negative body language when you want to send a positive message. Being too close to someone else could be seen as aggressive, even if you don't mean to be.

Pay attention to the tone of your communications. Remember that you convey how you're feeling not only in person but also on the phone and in your written communications, including email and instant messaging. Ensure that the message you send aligns with your intended meaning.

Ask for feedback. If you meant to sound upbeat at a meeting, for example, get feedback from trusted co-workers on how you came across. Ask open-ended questions that will reduce the possibility that they will say only what they think you want to hear. For example, try asking, "What do you think worked especially well in my presentation? Was there anything specific you think I could have improved?"

Make an effort to connect with people in positive, constructive ways. Start by assuming that your team members and others are trying to do their best and compliment them on specific things they are doing well.

Be careful about communicating when you are overwhelmed by emotion. In very frustrating situations, take the time to collect your thoughts. If possible, you might make notes for a future conversation and then return to them when you're feeling calmer and better able to communicate. Taking some time to do a mindfulness practice or meditation may help you feel less overwhelmed.

Take steps to keep your moods from affecting your judgment. According to a series of experiments done by Maurice E. Schweitzer and Jennifer Dunn of the Wharton School, a mood can affect your judgment even after it seems to have passed. You may want to take extra steps if you've been experiencing strong emotions, such as postponing certain decisions until a calmer day or asking for more input from others before making important decisions.

Understand the unwritten rules of your work culture. In some organizations, it's OK for managers to show, within limits, that they're in a bad mood—for example, by "venting" about a frustration as long as customers and clients can't hear. In other organizations, it's almost never OK

to do this. If you're uncertain about what's appropriate, talk with your manager or human resources (HR) department.

Special considerations for managers

Keep an eye on the "group mood" and dynamics of your team. The mood of a team holds clues to its wellbeing. If everyone in your group seems to be in a bad mood, there may be a work-related problem you need to resolve, such as a staffing or systems issue. Similarly, if more conflict or disagreement is happening within your team, having an open and honest conversation about the cause of the change may be warranted.

Be appropriately cheerful. Avoid putting on false happy airs if your organization is going through a very difficult time that includes layoffs or a steep loss of business. Insincerity can foster cynicism instead of trust. Instead, acknowledge the challenges your group is facing. Strive for a mood that's both authentic and positive.

Managing your moods doesn't mean denying that emotional reactions are important. It means becoming more aware of your moods so that you can respond to them in the ways that will have the most benefit for you, your team, and your organization.

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