



# NAVIGATING CONFLICT

## GETTING THE BEST OF YOUR EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

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**SOMETIMES, IT'S HARD** not to take things personally. Maybe you've spent the last week working feverishly on a new project only to be told it's not at all what someone wanted; or maybe you don't feel like your direct reports are listening to your instructions.

These and many other situations can cause your emotions to flare. How do you navigate conflicts without letting your emotions get the best of you?

You have almost certainly heard about IQ, but what do you know about EQ? Emotional intelligence, shortened to EQ or EI, was first introduced in 1990 by psychologists John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey. They defined emotional intelligence as the ability to reason about emotions and navigate emotional problems quickly and accurately.

### WHAT IS EQ?

As a human, you have over 200 deep emotions, but in general, there are four main emotional groups that drive you to act: happy, sad, angry and afraid, says Amy Crippen who leads Agriculture Future of America's immersive coaching experience the AFA Leader Fellowship™.

Our actions start with a feeling, followed by a thought and finally an action. Crippen says emotional intelligence is slowing down the brain's synapses between the transitions from feeling to thought and thought to action.

"You're trying to slow that process

down enough to be aware of it so that your responses to people are responses instead of reactions," she says. Prior to joining the AFA team, Crippen developed many development programs for organizations and was a licensed marriage and family counselor.

When you understand your own emotions enough to provide controlled responses instead of reactions, and you are able to observe and understand others' emotions, you are well on your way to influencing those around you. To Crippen, this is a mark of a true leader.

Along these lines, AFA provided an emotional intelligence training for its young professionals group, the AFA Alliance, with Edie Varley of the Varley Group. Zane Unrau, a member of the Alliance and a design engineer for AGCO Corporation, said he was thrilled when he heard the AFA Alliance was providing training on this topic.

"Emotional intelligence is a life skill," he said. "It's not something you just use in your career or personal life. You use it everywhere all the time. Anytime there are emotions involved, it has an impact."

Today, Unrau says he tries to slow down and evaluate the actions his emotions are leading him toward.

"You have to realize when your emotions are leading you in the right direction and when they're not," he said. "The important step in emotional intelligence is being able to look at each

situation and realize whether your emotions are in the right spot or if they are leading you astray."

While our culture perpetuates the idea that extroverts are better than introverts in relating to others, Crippen says this is not the case, particularly when it comes to emotional intelligence. Much of EQ is rooted in reflection, and everyone should flex their emotional intelligence muscles. In fact, the reflective thinking most introverts practice may give them an advantage when it comes to emotional intelligence.

### HOW TO DEVELOP EQ

So how do you stretch your emotional intelligence to become better at relating to others and navigating conflict no matter your personality type?

#### KNOW YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

Crippen suggests starting by getting to know your own emotions. This, of course, calls for reflection. She says to start by asking yourself what your family of origin said about emotions. Were they openly, and perhaps loudly expressed, or did everyone keep to themselves? Next, consider how you have expressed emotions in your relationships with roommates, significant others and teams. Finally, as you go through your life, check your emotional pulse often. Can you identify what you're feeling right now?

#### EXPLORE YOUR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

The next step in understanding your own emotions is exploring hypothetical situations, Crippen says. This is especially important if your family of origin downplayed emotions. "If you want to lead others, you're going to have to get comfortable dealing with emotions," she said.

Ask yourself how you would feel if you got a poor performance evaluation. How would you feel if you had to give one? How would you deal with someone who didn't like you at work?

#### PRACTICE READING OTHERS

After you get a better understanding of your own emotions, you can start to practice reading the emotions of others.

"The way to practice is through those really good listening skills of paraphrasing and clarifying," Crippen said. "You ask things like, 'Am I correct in assuming that you're upset with me right now? Did I hear correctly that you're anxious about completing this project on time?' Begin to practice by saying, 'Is this what is going on?'"

She suggests you also pay attention to things like personal space, language, humor and non-verbal responses. Being able to understand these, will help you pick up on cues when things are difficult.

#### REFLECT WITH A TRUSTED MENTOR

As you are practicing relating to others, find someone who can coach you through the process.

"Find someone you deeply trust who is hopefully more developed than you," Crippen said. "Reflect with another person who will be a good guide for you."

#### INTERRUPT RUNAWAY EMOTIONS

While you're getting a handle on your emotions, Unrau says a practical tip is to interrupt your runaway emotions.

"Emotions can totally overtake you without you ever realizing what is happening," he said. He noticed this happened when he was driving and was cut off by another car. "I would be fuming mad for the next five miles. Why did I let that bother me?"

In the broader world, having to step on your brake because of another car isn't worth being upset. It's simply allowing other people to control your emotions, and those emotions to control you.

Unrau said one of the suggestions from the Alliance program that he found helpful is wearing a rubber band around his wrist. When you feel your emotions are starting to take over, interrupt them by snapping the rubber band against the underside of your wrist. The physical interruption brings you back to reality.

#### PUT YOURSELF IN NEW SITUATIONS

Both Crippen and Unrau suggest putting yourself in new situations so you can better understand different cultures and the world around you as a whole.

"As human beings, we're not attracted to the idea of diversity," Crippen said. "You want to use your emotional intelligence to fight against that. Find people with diverse ideas because that is how we grow."

#### EQ AT WORK

In the workplace, emotional intelligence can help you navigate a new organization and help you develop strong relationships with your team.

#### OBSERVE THE CULTURE

When you enter a new organization, Crippen suggests you spend some time observing the

culture. While you want to come across as someone with a great work ethic, take time to understand the environment. Is it data driven or relationally driven? How does the team respond to conflict? How do they collaborate?

"Try to hold yourself back for the first couple of weeks and observe, observe, observe," she said. "Take good notes. Ask good questions."

#### READ YOUR BOSS EARLY AND OFTEN

"Another thing to do is read your boss early and often," Crippen said. She suggests verbally asking your boss questions but also listen to instincts.

You should ask about things like preference in communication and reporting. Be curious about their behavioral patterns. Seek to understand your boss and the rest of your team as you build your relationships.

#### ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Perhaps one of the best results of great emotional intelligence is the ability to facilitate open communication. By using those great listening and paraphrasing skills you've been developing, you can directly address conflict as it comes up.

"That's the thing with emotional intelligence," Crippen said. "You have to articulate it. We're not very good at that. It takes practice, but it's worth it. Emotional intelligence is an opportunity to continue to develop skills in the art and science of people."

