



COMMIT TO A DAILY EMOTIONAL WORKOUT TO IMPROVE YOUR LEADERSHIP

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We can choose how to channel our emotional energy in positive or negative ways. Learning how to recognize and work with our emotions offers significant benefits to every aspect of our lives.

The emotional brain holds ten times more storage capacity than the rational brain. Let that sink in a while – our brains are constantly creating ‘emotional data’ to help process our sense of security, joy, risk or danger.

Humans have evolved predominantly through teamwork and our emotionally driven relational abilities and needs reflect this. However, in work situations, we often choose to ignore emotional responses to our collective detriment.

“To begin to encourage emotional intelligence in ourselves, we must start by noticing the emotional data that our brains have produced throughout our lives, but we have perhaps become trained to ignore,” said Silke Mischke, IMD Executive Coach.

Reversing that process is the same as returning to a gym program after a long break – the first few weeks can be tough but very soon, the new habit is formed, the muscles are strengthened and you are in the right zone.

Here are four ways that you can begin to build and utilize your innate emotional intelligence. Mischke explains that the first two skills are experiential and involve you developing your own emotional literacy.

The second two skills are more strategic. Once developed, these capabilities utilize the wealth of emotional data your brain creates to improve relationships, team building and help you manage challenging times with adaptive responsiveness.

1. Train yourself to perceive emotions

Allow yourself to actively notice how you and others around you feel. Ask people how they are feeling, rather than what they are thinking to start becoming more emotionally adept.

Watch movies with someone who is good at reading emotions – what do they perceive that you might have missed?

Keep a daily emotional diary to start creating a clearer channel of self-awareness. Emotional diaries are simple matrix boards that allow us to become aware of how energy and mood are linked.

Note your mood and energy and then ask the following questions:

- What caused the emotion?
- What are my behavior and actions (reactions to the emotions)?
- Why did I experience the feeling?
- How did it impact others?

2. Use emotions intelligently

Create a link between your emotions and your actions in order to build an internal relationship with your perceived feelings and their sources. Ask yourself whether the feeling helps or hinders the situation.

When you observe a particular feeling in a colleague, share that you understand that feeling. Saying “You seem worried”, for example, creates space for deeper communication, reinforces relational bonds and enables trust.

3. Understand emotions

To develop your emotional fluency, start by asking others you trust to describe feelings you do not understand.

If you find yourself the most emotionally fluent person in your team, leverage your ability for the whole team’s wellbeing and success. Offer “what if” scenarios to your colleagues in order to make recommendations based on the emotional data you perceive. Take it further by showing how the feeling could impact team targets positively or negatively.

4. Manage emotions

Working with emotions is more a question of successfully managing them rather than controlling them. The former implies a healthy responsiveness to the data that is being perceived, while the latter indicates an unhealthy denial of what is being felt.

Responsive and preventative strategies invite self-reflection and ensure that emotional overwhelm does not occur in damaging ways.

Anger, for example, is a potentially explosive emotion that needs to be well managed in order to understand and address its source. It can then be channeled more effectively to great benefit.

Physiological techniques, such as simple breathing practices, changing the situation by going for a walk or self-talk can also help to lighten an oppressive emotional mood. Similarly, reappraising the situation enables processing time and applying curiosity to the emotional data can help modify the mood.