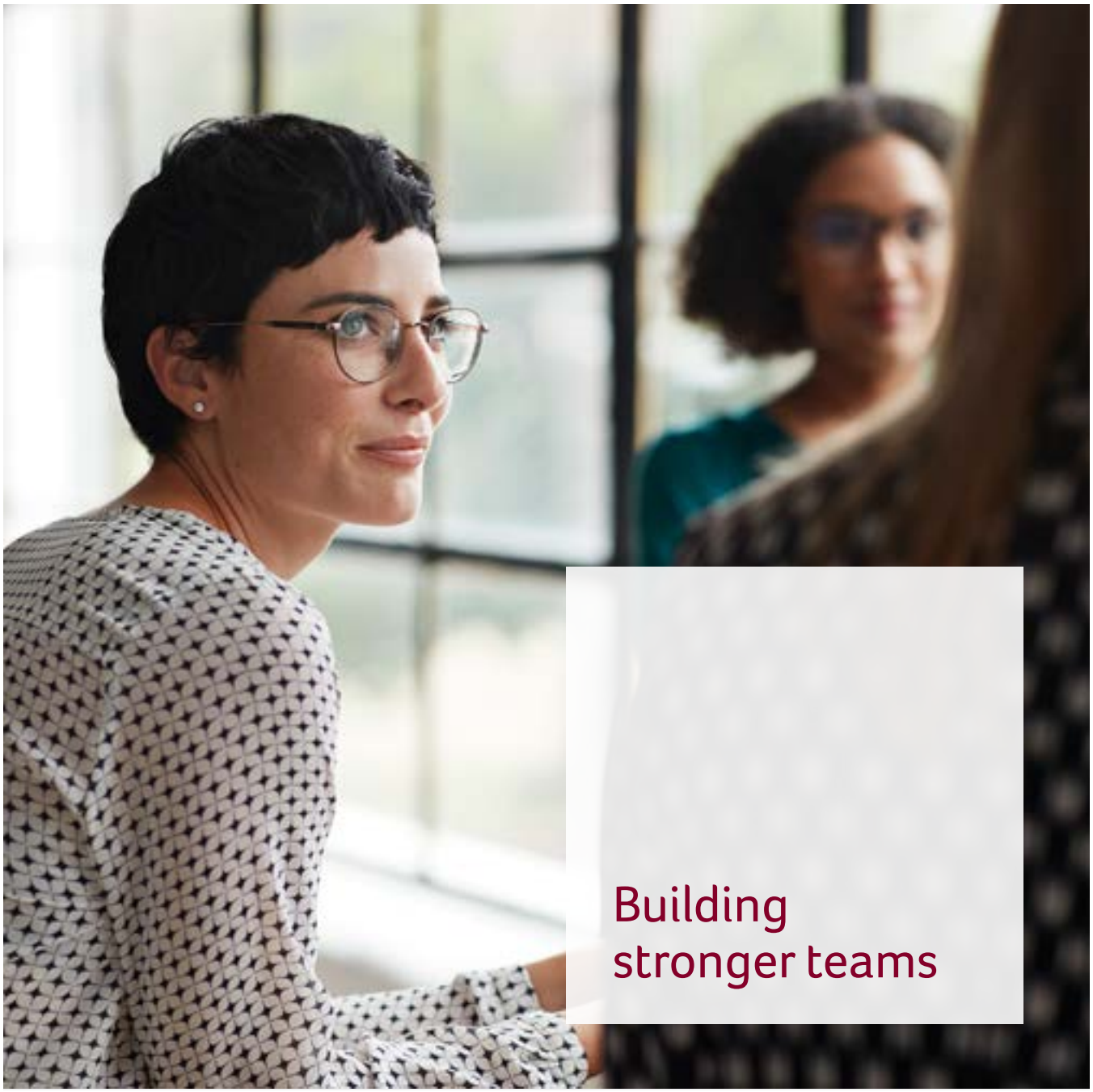
Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life



Building stronger teams

Activities for developing team resilience

About Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health creates tools and resources for workplace mental health and psychological safety.

Everything on our website is available for all Canadians at no cost, compliments of Canada Life.

At Canada Life, we help employers and employees reach their potential every day. Workplace Strategies for Mental Health is a great example of this commitment. Designed with Canadians in mind, our tools and resources are:

- Evidence- and practice-based
- Easy to use – like turn-key workshop materials
- Customizable
- Produced in English and French
- Available to download or print

Workplace Strategies also supports workplace mental health research and initiatives that:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of workplace psychological health and safety
- Offer practical strategies and tools to help employers turn knowledge into action
- Help anyone in any organization respond to mental health issues at work

Since 2007, Workplace Strategies has been vital in providing free and credible public resources. We:

- Fund and sponsor research and initiatives to improve the understanding, prevention and management of mental health issues – especially in the workplace
- Promote and share research, resources and survey results
- Support and develop programs and resources
- Collaborate with experts across Canada

A free digital version of this guide is available at **clwsmh.com**

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The information contained in this document is not intended to be a substitute for appropriate professional medical advice from your own physician or other health-care provider.

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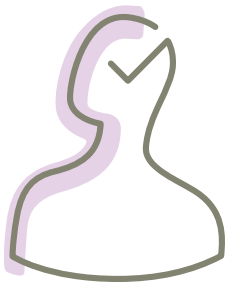
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Introduction

Teams are successful when the competence and confidence of each member is supported.



Building stronger teams provides practical activities for developing your team's ability to problem solve, be objective and work well together. All of these skills are related to emotional intelligence and resilience.

This book draws on the emotional intelligence resources developed by Dr. Joti Samra, R.Psych., for Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. This work is available online, compliments of Canada Life at **clwsmh.com/resources/emotional-intelligence-assessment**

In addition to Dr. Samra's work, some team-building activities provided in Building Stronger Teams were developed by experts from across Canada who came together to share their knowledge and insights. The activities can help teams respond more effectively to stressors, resolve issues, and support each other through challenging times.

As a leader, you can pick and choose from the activities provided and use those that are the best fit for you and your team.

Resilience is the ability to withstand both everyday stressors and more serious incidents without damage to mental health.

Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to manage one's own emotions, as well as the ability to recognize and appropriately respond to the emotional distress of others.

Why is building resilience important for teams?

In a 2015 study on resilience[1], researchers reported on the value of resilience with work teams as follows: "Some professional groups work in highly stressful settings and are therefore particularly at risk of conditions such as anxiety, depression, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout. However, some individuals are less affected by workplace stress and the associated negative outcomes. Such individuals have been described as 'resilient'…Workplace stress has serious implications for the quality of a team member's work and their general psychological functioning."

> Personal resilience is the result of many factors including genetics, family history, personal experience, learned behaviour, and state of health. The more unprepared or helpless someone feels in a situation, the more likely they may be at risk of harm. This risk can be reduced when team members are supportive of each other, are prepared for challenging situations and develop relevant problem-solving skills.

Serious traumatic incidents in the workplace pose a significant risk for psychological harm. Psychological harm occurs when exposure to a stressor overwhelms a person's ability to cope with everyday life. Resilience may help preserve or restore one's coping strategies in these situations. Psychological harm can impact all aspects of a person's ability to function at work, including how they think, manage change or conflict, and relate to their co-workers.

We often think of serious traumatic events as including a threat to life or safety. But any situation in any job that leaves a person feeling overwhelmed can affect their ability to work and cope. This can include perceptions of conflict, bullying, harassment, betrayal or humiliation.

No one can predict when a person may be psychologically harmed. It is a person's individual perspective of what occurred, rather than the objective facts, that determines whether they will experience a negative impact.

The activities that follow focus on common workplace scenarios that you can customize for your unique situation to help build resilience for yourself and your team.

[1] Understanding individual resilience in the workplace: the international collaboration of workforce resilience model Clare S. Rees*, Lauren J. Breen, Lynette Cusack and Desley Hegney, Frontiers in Psychology, HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY ARTICLE, February 2015



Additional activities are available at clwsmh.com



1

Team-building activities



As leaders, we are only as strong as the teams we build, and sustaining an effective team is an ongoing effort.

The intention of these activities is to help build team resilience over time. The activities were developed by experts in the areas of trauma, resilience and emotional intelligence. They can be included as part of scheduled team meetings rather than requiring separate meetings each time you want to do an activity. Most of the activities can be facilitated virtually or in person.

Each activity should take 30 minutes or less for a team of about 12 people.

Use these activities to help improve team effectiveness, increase self-awareness, foster civility and respect, build emotional intelligence, or develop mindfulness. This can help team members respond more effectively to pressures or stressors at work, resolve workplace issues and support each other through challenging times. Choose the activities that you as a leader feel most comfortable with, and those that you feel will benefit your team in the following areas:

- Team effectiveness
- Civility and respect
- Self-awareness
- Emotional intelligence
- Well-being

If you would like to improve your ability to lead team discussions, you may want to review **clwsmh.com/resources/facilitation-tips-for-leaders**.

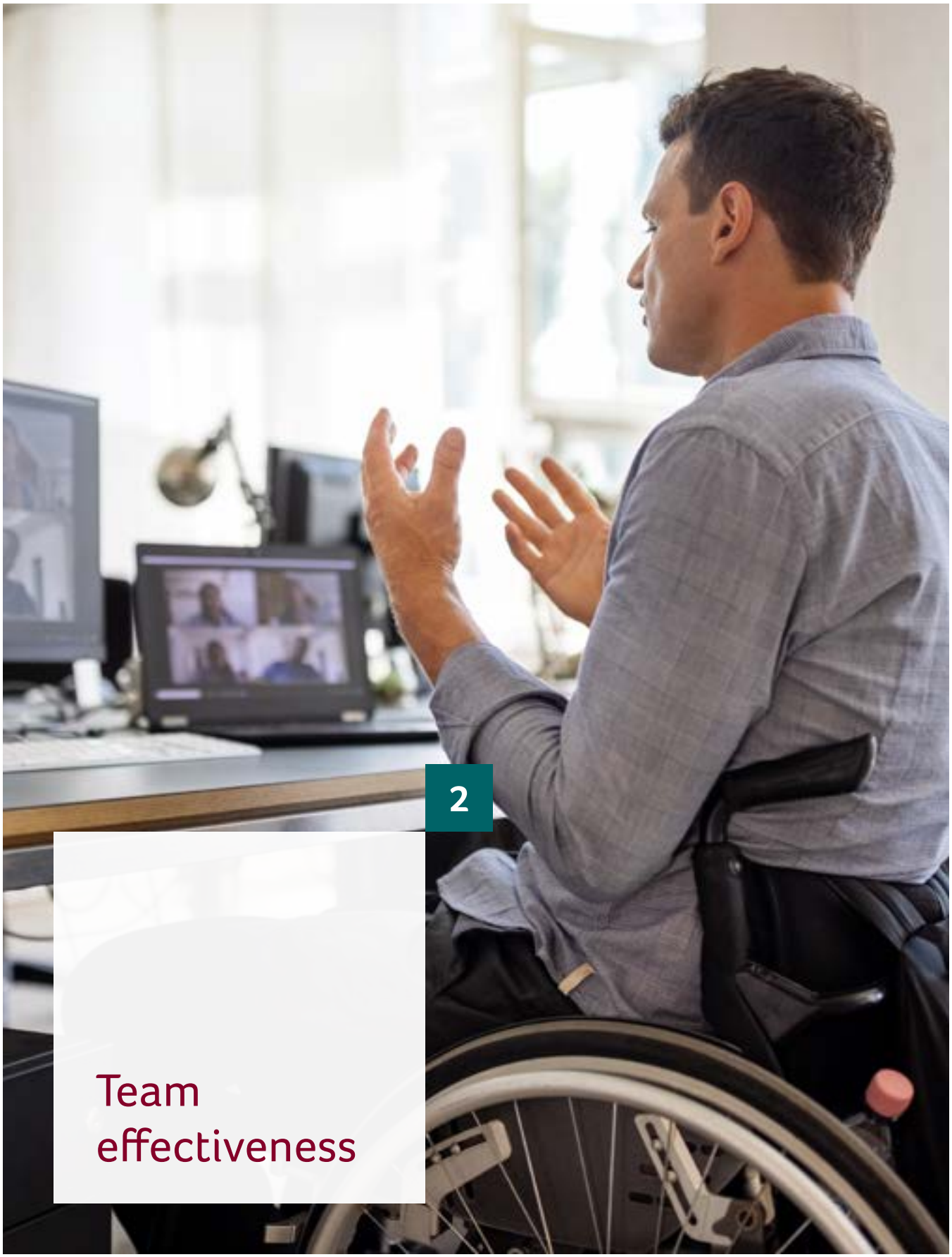
Additional resources

Resilience for teams

Learn why resilience is a workplace issue and how to address it. You will see evidence for building team resilience and actionable resources to start.

Team building activities

Discover team building activities, facilitation strategies for discussions, the importance of resilience and more. The resources are both practical and easy to use in a variety of workplaces.



2

Team effectiveness



The ability to share and learn from the experiences of others is an efficient way to improve team effectiveness as well as individual performance.

The following activities provide strategies and opportunities for sharing information in ways that can benefit the entire team:

Team huddle

Increase team effectiveness and build team resilience by acknowledging team members' wins and supporting one another's challenges.

Good enough vs. perfection

Develop shared and reasonable expectations in terms of quality of work.

Mistake meetings

Develop a sense of openness and trust amongst the team.

Identify and overcome obstacles

Help team members focus on solutions and strategies they can use to overcome obstacles they may perceive are in the way of achieving their goals.

React to workplace stress

Engage the team in reviewing how they handled past stressful work situations, and what they learned, to develop strategies for the future.

Reflect on the past

Draw on past experiences to develop awareness of personal coping strategies.

Deal with disappointment

Ask team members to consider how they faced and moved beyond a work-related disappointment.

Relevant resources

Burnout response

Learn the steps that can help you identify, prevent or reduce the impact of burnout for employees or yourself.

Employee mental health issues

Use these resources to address the practical, personal and organizational issues so you can support effective accommodation of an employee with a disability.

Helping employees to manage change

Use these strategies to help support employees to handle change in a psychologically safe way, especially those vulnerable to mental stress and overwhelm.

Leveraging team wisdom workshop

Help your team members connect with each other practically and effectively, work together to address obstacles and learn from each other.

Performance management

Focus on solutions and employee success instead of problems and failings to help those dealing with life stressors, including mental health issues.

Team huddle

Approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on the group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity can increase team effectiveness and can help build team resilience through celebrating wins and providing support for challenges.

Instructions

This activity may help save time spent in regular team meetings, as it can be scheduled more frequently, but much shorter in duration and more focused on tactical issues. It can also help:

- Foster positive workplace culture
- Identify potential issues early
- Identify and remove health and safety risks for employees, clients or customers
- Increase sense of self-responsibility in employees
- Increase employee engagement
- Prepare the team to be better at responding in an emergency
- Develop instant/timely communication skills
- Provide an automatic triage of team priorities for the day

The group should consist of those who work together or whose work is dependent on each other. For groups larger than 20 people, consider breaking the group into smaller teams of about 10 members each. Bring the group together daily or weekly for a team huddle to discuss successes and challenges.

If possible, participants in this activity should be standing rather than sitting. If you are facilitating this virtually, explain how people go into a breakout room. Encourage them to stand in front of the camera to more closely simulate the team huddle experience. This activity is best conducted at the beginning of the day or shift. For 24-7 organizations, you can do this as a way of building shift continuity, and connecting the outgoing and incoming shifts though sharing of successes.

No meeting minutes need be taken, but the facilitator can use a flip chart or screen to record and display action items. If you think it will improve team comfort, you can offer to go first.

Suggested wording

I'd like everyone to stand up (if you're able to) for this activity. You're going to take turns sharing an example of at least one success you've had in the past week. You'll talk about that success in relation to what has been working well for you (it can be technology, flexibility, co-worker support, new strategies, etc.), and in the second round, you'll share a challenge you're facing or a need for information or assistance. For example, in round one, you might share that you met a tight deadline because a co-worker shared a template that made it easier for you to do repetitive work.

In round 2, you might share that you are still unclear about how to change images on a PowerPoint slide. Once you share a challenge or ask for information, anyone in the group can provide advice or offer their help.

Are there any questions about what you are going to do?

[**Field any questions.**]

Round 1: Name one success you've had at work and what helped you achieve that.

[**Give participants 4 minutes to answer these questions in their groups.**]

Round 2: You will each share a challenge you've experienced or ask for help or advice. The rest of the group can offer a suggestion if they have one. Each person should take no more than 2 minutes for the question and the answer. Of course, if the answers are of interest to the person who is asking, they can follow up after the huddle for more information.

[**After 10 minutes.**]

The point of the huddle is that it is no more than 15 minutes a day, making it a quick and easy way to check in with each other on a regular basis. For larger teams, you might want to rotate who is in which huddle so that it's small enough to be efficient, but everybody gets exposure to everybody else over time. In addition to leveraging the wisdom of the team, this activity can increase team cohesion through celebrating successes and addressing challenges together.

Instructions

The facilitator can look out for the successes and lessons learned, and highlight them with leadership. You may also want to consider some additional strategies:

- If someone has not participated in a few days, encourage them to do so.
- Ask the team to report on positive feedback received from clients, patients, or customers.
- If one individual or question requires more time than was planned for, end the huddle on time and then pick up where you left off the next day/week, or meet with the individual privately. The huddle should be a continual, quick process.
- Depending on the team or organization, the facilitator may want to end the meeting with notes on key priorities for the day.

Activity developed with help from: Lisa Doulas, TEND; Deborah Connors, Well-Advised Consulting Inc.; Graham Lowe, The Graham Lowe Group; Catherine Morisset, Imagine Plus.

Good enough vs. perfection

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on the group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity can help develop shared and reasonable expectations in terms of quality of work.

Instructions

Facilitate a discussion with your team about the concept of "perfection" vs. "good enough". It may be helpful to identify a specific project or process you wish to feature as the topic for the discussion.

As you start the discussion, be aware of differences. For example, some people strive for perfect results and value quality of work over speed. Other people value speed or quantity of work completed as a standard of success. Both are relevant and valuable when a reasonable balance is achieved. When these two types of employees work together and have rigid or extreme expectations, they may experience stress because of their different values and styles.

You may also wish to assign a note taker, so you can share the discussion points with the group after the meeting. Facilitate the discussion according to the steps in the order shown below.

Suggested wording

Although we talk about striving for excellence, it is important to distinguish when "good enough" is, well, good enough. It is not a realistic strategy to expect perfection 100% of the time, and doing so can actually result in missing deadlines, hiding errors or causing unnecessary stress.

Today we will look at [**identify one of your existing tasks, processes or projects**] and determine when "good enough" is acceptable and where excellence is necessary. I know that we may not all agree, but the goal of this conversation is to make a team decision that can help relieve stress due to unnecessary pressure.

1. First, let's identify the major tasks of the project or process.
2. Next, let's consider where a higher level of quality or attention to detail is necessary, and why.
3. Now, let's consider the tasks where good enough is actually good enough, and how we would measure good enough. For example, how many minor typos or errors are acceptable? What parts of design can be simplified? What decisions require approvals and which ones can be made at the front line?
4. What other stressors are related to this particular work?
5. Are there other ways we can manage or reduce stress while maintaining our ability to get the job done?

[**Once you've arrived at decisions related to the answers to these questions, you can wrap up with the following.**]

We've agreed on what must meet our highest standards and when good enough is still delivering an acceptable level of quality or performance. This clarity alone can reduce stress.

It's also helpful to be aware of the pressure for those who strive to achieve an absolute perfect quality of work, and the stress that they experience in working with those who don't share the same values. Constantly striving for perfection may cause stress that just isn't warranted.

On the other hand, those who feel judged or slowed down by unreasonable expectations of perfection can also feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Working hard is rarely the problem, but working under extreme pressure can be stressful. If we clarify what's reasonable and expected, we can help manage our workload better, reduce our own stress, and improve productivity.

Instructions

Following the meeting, distribute the recorded notes to the group.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Mistake meetings

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity can help develop a sense of openness and trust amongst the team.

Instructions

In a workplace where mistakes are concealed for fear of reprisal, hidden problems can become dangerous or costly. The goal of this activity is to imagine and work toward a workplace where mistakes are seen as part of learning, and solutions are shared among team members to prevent the same mistake from being repeated.

As a leader, you can set the tone by sharing one or more mistakes that you've made since the last meeting. Follow up by sharing how you corrected the mistake, or use this opportunity to ask for ideas to problem solve the situation.

If you think your team or workplace will react strongly to the word "mistake", you can ask them to share a "challenge" instead; the intent would be the same.

Ask the participants to be sure to have at least one mistake to share for this meeting. They can either share what they did to correct it or ask for help to solve a problem. Set the ground rules up front by stating that it's not the intention to belittle or ridicule anyone for the mistake they choose to share.

Suggested wording

In any organization where continual improvement and innovation are expected, we'll make mistakes. The goal is to learn from our mistakes. One way that we can do this is by sharing our experiences and either sharing how we corrected the mistake or asking the team for help to solve the problem.

I'm going to go first, and at subsequent meetings, you'll each be expected to bring something to the meeting that you can share but a challenge you've encountered or a mistake that you've made.

Here's a mistake that I made recently […]

Instructions

In some workplaces, team members may be reluctant at first, but if you can be forthcoming in sharing your mistakes, over time this process can encourage people to be open about mistakes rather than trying to hide them. It also provides an opportunity for the team to help each other improve the quality of their work.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton

Identify and overcome obstacles

Approximately 30 minutes

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps you and your team develop a problem-solving method to help you overcome obstacles.

Preparation

1. Review the entire activity
2. Create a participant list with email, text, or phone for distribution of the invitation.
3. Create an invitation by customizing the sample below.
4. Send the invitation to all participants leaving sufficient time for them to answer all of the questions. This will allow your discussion time to be more productive.
5. Suggested invitation wording

Mail

Subject: Please answer these 7 questions before our meeting

We will explore a problem-solving method at our next team meeting. We'll try it out using the example of managing stress related to learning a new technology [Or any other situation that's relevant to your team]. Our overall objective is to customize this process to be used for any work situation.

The outcome we're striving for is a healthy, safe and productive workplace when we're introducing a new technology. To achieve this, we need to protect our mental and physical well-being while supporting our ability to do good work. The questions below focus on what we can do to reach this outcome. Consider the existing environment, the learning curve, how we interact with each other and our clients, psychological safety, and task completion.

You will be asked to share your answers to each of the following questions at our meeting:

1. How will we know when we've reached the desired outcome(s)?
2. What will we see, hear and feel?
3. How would a third-party observer be able to tell that we've reached the outcome(s) we wanted? (What would they see or hear?)
4. What will reaching this outcome(s) do for our team?
5. What stops us from reaching it now?
6. What are we willing to do in order to reach our desired outcome(s)?
7. What are we willing to stop doing in order to reach our desired outcome?
8. Is there something we have been doing that is preventing us from reaching the desired outcome(s)?

Suggested wording

Welcome everyone. This activity today is to help build a problem-solving model for our team. It also gives you a chance to show off your creativity and critical thinking skills.

I will present each of questions one at a time. To make it go smoothly, I will ask a couple of you to share your answers and then the rest can share any that they have that are different. I will ask the next question of two different people and we will also ask for the rest to share anything unique that they have to contribute. Any questions about the process?

1. How will we know when we have reached the desired outcome(s)?
2. What will we see, hear and feel?
3. How would a third-party observer be able to tell that we have reached the outcome(s) we wanted? (What would they see or hear?)
4. What will reaching this outcome(s) do for our team?
5. What stops us from reaching it now?
6. What are we willing to do in order to reach our desired outcome(s)?
7. What are we willing to stop doing in order to reach our desired outcome?
8. Is there something we have been doing that is preventing us from reaching the desired outcome(s)?

[**After all questions have been answered**]

Thank you for your contribution to exploring this problem-solving model. We'll take away your suggestions and develop a plan for dealing with the introduction of new technology. The draft will be sent out to you for your feedback and we'll set up another meeting to discuss next steps.

Instructions

Write up the key takeaways from your session with definite action items as suggested by the participants. Send it out to all participants and invite feedback within one week. Integrate relevant suggestions and then set up another virtual meeting to discuss how you will begin to adopt the agreed upon actions going forward.

React to workplace stress

Approximately 20 minutes

Learning objective

We can experience stress in both in person and virtual or remote work settings. This activity will help you brainstorm potential solutions and coping strategies for workplace stress.

Preparation

Choose a stressor from this list, or one common to your workplace, as the discussion topic for this activity. You may be able to cover more than one stressor in this activity.

- Tight deadlines
- Competing demands
- Work-life balance
- Customer/ client demands
- Lack of clarity
- Dealing with change
- Pressure to perform

Instructions

In a team discussion, ask team members to:

1. Individually record as many approaches to coping or dealing with this stressor as they can.
2. Have small groups of 3 discuss their approaches and group them into their top 5 suggestions. Tell them to appoint one person to report back.
3. Take up the top 5 suggestions from each group.
4. Ask if anyone has additional ideas.
5. Ask individuals to record which approach or coping strategy they'll try. Tell them they don't need to share this.
6. Record all the ideas and send the final list to all participants.

After some discussion, provide the brief wrap-up below.

Suggested wording

Thank you for your ideas. Hopefully we all have some new strategies to help us reduce workplace stress. When new stressors arise, we can go through this process again to develop solutions for them.

Activity developed with help from: Adriana Ricketts, Sarah Jenner, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Reflect on the past

Approximately 30 minutes

Learning objective

This team-building activity encourages employees to reflect on past challenges and share coping strategies.

Preparation

Prior to this session, complete the questions below using an example from your own work-life approach.

At least 48 hours before your meeting, ask participants to complete the following:

Mail

Consider a challenging work situation you've successfully dealt with in the past and reflect on these questions. You'll be asked to share your answers at our next meeting.

- What made the situation challenging?
- What personal coping strategies did you use to manage stress during this time? For example, going for a walk, talking to someone, deep breathing, stepping away from office space or computer setting, etc.
- What supports did you access or use, either personally or through work?
- What would you do differently if you faced the same situation now?
- What did you learn, or how did you grow, from this experience?
- What advice would you have for someone else going through a similar situation now?

You're not required to share any personal or health information. Please don't include any names or identifying information in your answers. The point of this activity is for us to share coping strategies for work situations any of us could face.

Instructions

At the beginning of the meeting, let everyone know they only have to share as much as they're comfortable with regarding past work-related challenges.

Be the first one to share your example and answers. You can then ask for volunteers to share theirs. You may find it most effective to go through the list of questions with each person rather than jumping from person to person. Get as many people as possible to share within the meeting time frame. If you're running out of time, skip to the last question about advice for dealing with work-related challenges and stress.

As individuals are speaking, take the opportunity to prompt them to share the coping strategies they used or point them out yourself.

Suggested wording

Work-related challenges are an inevitable part of working life. We're better able to deal with work stress when we have appropriate personal, professional or social supports around us. To prepare for the meeting today, I asked you to consider a past challenging work situation you dealt with. I'll share my example and then each of you can share yours. The questions were:

- What made the situation challenging?
- What personal coping strategies did you use to manage stress during this time? For example, going for a walk, talking to someone, deep breathing, stepping away from office space or computer setting, etc.
- What supports did you access or use, either personally or through work?
- What would you do differently if you faced the same situation now?
- What did you learn, or how did you grow, from this experience?
- What advice would you have for someone else going through a similar situation now?

[**When you're finished your example, ask who'd like to go next. If there are no volunteers, you can simply say that you'll start with the people on the list and go through one at a time. If you have too many participants to allow everyone to share, skip to the last question about advice for dealing with work-related challenges and stress. When you're done, you can wrap-up with the following:**]

Thank you for sharing your ideas and strategies. The discussion today can help us better deal with future challenges. We know these coping strategies and ideas won't work for everyone, so I encourage you to think about what would work best for you. The idea is to expect challenges to arise and use what we learn to address them.

Activity developed with help from: Adriana Ricketts, Dr. Joti Samra, Sarah Jenner, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Deal with disappointment

Approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on the group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps develop skills to move beyond the inevitable disappointments in life.

Instructions

Provide the brief introduction below and then ask team members to do the activity outlined. Note: Three years is usually enough time to have gained insight about a past disappointment. A more recent disappointment may not work for this activity.

If someone in your group was recently passed over for a promotion, the suggested wording below should be modified to a less personally painful example, such as a business closing down or some other disappointment.

Ask each person to jot down a few notes so that they know which event in their lives they are referring to. If someone cannot think of an example, allow them to pass. Once they have written down the event, ask them to write their responses to the two questions below.

Suggested wording

Imagine working hard for many years, maybe your whole career, in the same job and then a promotion becomes available. You feel this is finally your chance to move forward. Your co-workers seemingly all believe you deserve it and are behind you. And then you don't get the promotion.

It can be devastating.

What I'd like you to do now is recall a work-related disappointment from at least three years ago. It could be while working here or at a previous job. It could be a door that closed or an opportunity denied. It could be a project that was not successful or a plan that was shelved.

Next take a moment to record your answers to the following two questions, which I'll ask you to share.

1. What opportunities were eventually made possible after the disappointment?
2. How did the disappointment help you grow, develop or change?

Instructions

Share your personal response and then ask for volunteers to share theirs. After everyone who wants to share has done so (just 2 or 3 people is sufficient to make the point), move on to the following wrap up.

Suggested wording

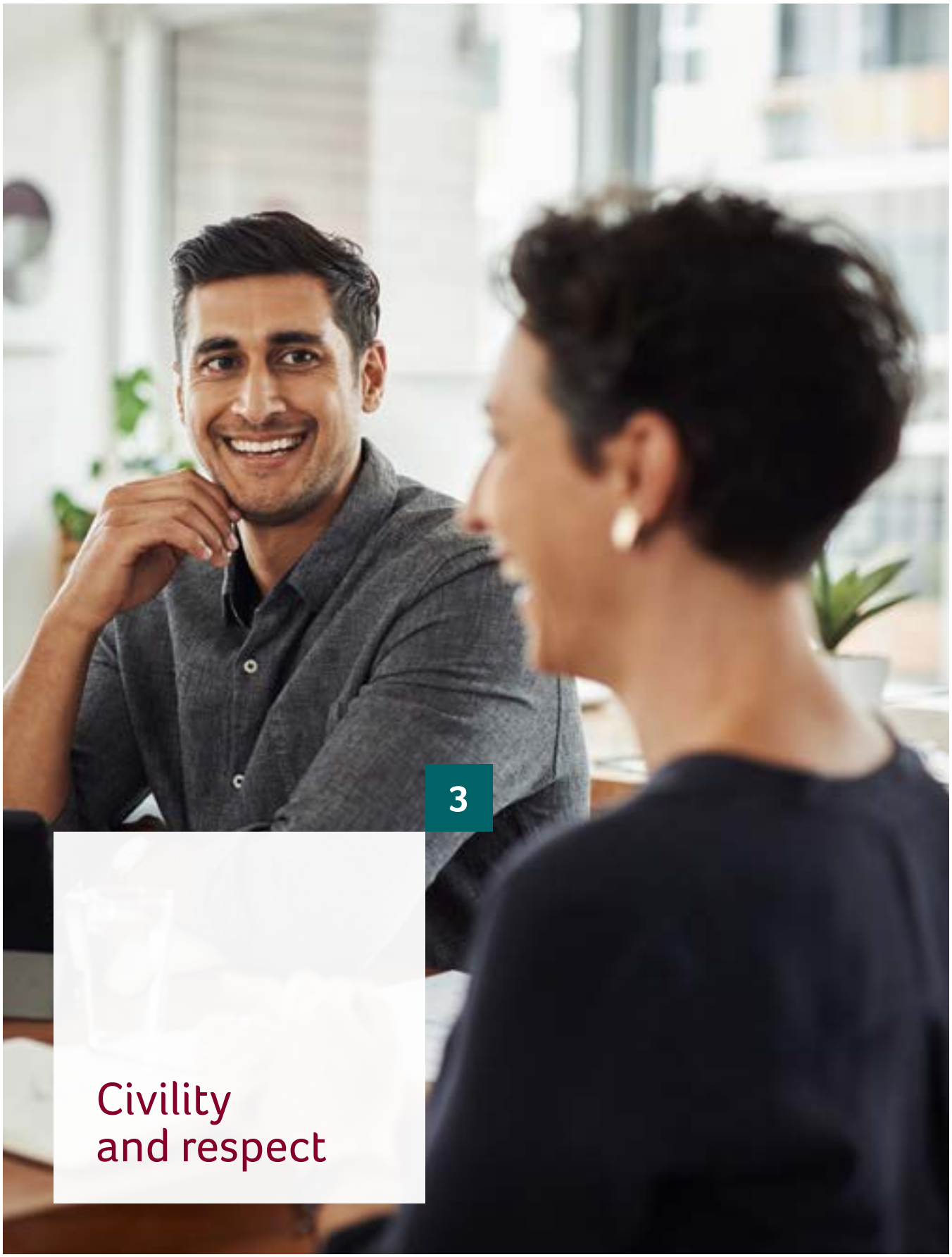
Often what seems like a defeat in life can actually be a stepping-stone to something else. In the example shared about not getting a promotion, the individual decided to look for another job and ended up in a new and exciting career.

Looking back, they realized that had they been given the promotion, they would have stayed where they were and missed out on an amazing opportunity.

Understanding what good can come from disappointment may not make it easier in the moment, but it can help us to gain perspective and put it behind us faster.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton

Notes



3

Civility and respect



When team members don't feel safe speaking up or don't know how to do so respectfully, it can cause high levels of stress and dysfunction within the team.

The activities in this section help to improve civility and respect among team members:

Recognize active acknowledgement

Help the team develop skills to respond and acknowledge one another in specific and active ways.

Volunteering together

Build team resilience through a shared sense of making a difference.

Practicing non-judgmental interpretations

Have team members consider more constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours.

Recognize strengths

Have team members think and talk about the strengths that others bring to the team.

Acknowledge our accomplishments

Provide an opportunity for team members to share positive contributions they have made that may not have been recognized by you or others.

Microaggressions

It's completely possible to unintentionally engage in microaggressions. By becoming aware of our own implicit biases, we can learn to avoid comments or actions that may have a negative impact on others.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality focuses on the overlap of various social identities one person may hold. This activity can help reveal areas where we may hold unconscious bias towards particular groups.

Relevant resources

Being a mindful employee

Help employees understand their responsibility and opportunities to contribute to a mentally healthy workplace as described in the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety.

Implicit bias workshop

A self–reflection workshop that explores the attitudes and stereotypes that affect our actions, decisions and unconscious understanding towards or against a particular person or people group.

Mental health awareness videos

Share this video series to provide practical coping strategies that can be used by individuals at work, off work and when returning to work.

Psychologically safe interactions workshop

Use this slide presentation, facilitator guide and participant handout to engage your team in a workshop that increases awareness of how our behaviours may be interpreted as bullying, even when that wasn't our intention.

Putting civility and respect on the agenda: Creating awareness workshop

Learn how to facilitate a team discussion to address and improve civility and respect in the workplace. This resource includes a guide and slides to help you get started.

Resolving personal conflict

Use these ideas to help individuals resolve their own conflicts at work.

Supportive conversation library

Questions and strategies to help you have a supportive conversation with someone you care about on difficult topics like mental health, stress, addiction, anger, abuse or lying.

Recognize active acknowledgement

Approximately 30 minutes

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps us recognize how the way we respond to others in person and virtually can impact our relationships.

Preparation

At least 48 hours before your meeting, ask participants the following:

For the next team meeting, we're going to do an activity where we'll explore different ways of responding to others. Please read the following 3 approaches so that you're prepared to complete the activity.

1. **Acknowledgement** – This could be a simple nod or "Good for you" without showing specific emotion or engagement. For example, sending an email saying "thanks for the work" without any specific expressions of appreciation.
2. **Active acknowledgement** – This includes more energy and attention, such as looking the person in the eyes, even you're on screen, and responding enthusiastically. For example, "Wow! That's great!"
3. **Specific, active acknowledgement** – This approach is descriptive, meaningful and focused. It includes details about why you appreciate what the person said or did. It also discusses what you're acknowledging them for: "You got the promotion! Opening up yourself to new possibilities has really paid off. What does this mean for you?"

Instructions

Before the session, create a document and email or file share to record the 3 levels of acknowledgement (see optional handout below). If you're completing this activity in an online environment, you'll need to offer more direct cues for acknowledgement. Encourage your team to turn their cameras on during the virtual meeting, but respect if they wish to proceed without them. Your words are important in this instance when acknowledging team members.

Here are three levels of acknowledgement:

1. **Acknowledgement** – This could be a simple nod or "Good for you" without showing specific emotion or engagement. For example, sending an email to your team to acknowledge their work.
2. **Active acknowledgement** – This includes more energy and attention. For example, looking the person in the eyes and responding more enthusiastically: "Wow! That's great!" When you set up an online meeting, look your team members in the eyes "virtually" through your webcam to actively acknowledge them. If you're not setting up an online meeting, send a quick enthusiastic, recorded message to your team to state your acknowledgement.
3. **Specific, active acknowledgement** – This approach is descriptive, meaningful and focused. It includes details about why you appreciate what the person said or did. It also discusses what you're acknowledging them for: "You got the promotion! Opening yourself up to new possibilities has really paid off. What does this mean for you?"

Suggested wording

Let's review the 3 types of acknowledgement I sent you. Could somebody read the first one, "acknowledgement"?

Can someone read the second one, "active acknowledgement"?

Can someone read the third one, "specific, active acknowledgement"?

We use all 3 of these. We use the first one when we're distracted or overwhelmed; our focus is on ourselves and not anyone else. When we use the second one, we may think we're expressing real support, but it can sound hollow. The "Atta boy" kind of response may not be specific enough to feel sincere. But, either of these first 2 are significantly better than sarcasm or no acknowledgement at all.

The point of this activity is to help us recognize when we use each of these and to try to increase the likelihood, we'll use specific, active acknowledgement to support each other more effectively.

Let's get started.

If a team member described being pleased because their idea for a new project was well received, they would likely appreciate your positive feedback. To offer specific, active acknowledgement, congratulate them and ask for details about how it happened, using open-ended questions while giving them your full attention. Maintain eye contact during the conversation and display a genuine positive reaction.

Let's use the example of someone successfully facilitating a virtual cooking class to support healthy eating for coworkers. I want you to record the words you'd use to acknowledge their effort, using each of the 3 approaches explained earlier. We'll take up your answers when you're done.

Instructions

Here are some examples of how someone might respond for each level:

Acknowledgement: "Good job."

Active acknowledgement: "That's great. I'm so glad our workplace supports events like this."

Specific, active acknowledgement: "You made that lesson both interesting and easy to follow! Your enthusiasm really made it enjoyable. Did you have fun doing it?"

Once team members have contributed some ideas, open a discussion about how the way they interact with each other can contribute to a better work environment, whether they're meeting in person or virtually.

Suggested wording

Specific, active acknowledgement may not always be practical due to time constraints and work setting. But, when you can respond in this way, it can help create a supportive work environment for everyone. When you're on the receiving end of specific, active acknowledgement, recognize the effort someone is making by saying something like, "I appreciate your interest and encouragement."

Activity developed with help from: Adriana Ricketts, Sarah Jenner, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Volunteering together

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size (plus the time spent on the actual volunteering project)

Learning objective

This team-building activity can help build resiliency through improved social support and self-efficacy.

Instructions

Have your team choose a project that everyone can take part in either virtually or in-person: supporting a soup kitchen, holding a charitable or fundraising event, sponsoring a child, etc.

If the project that your team wants is not obvious, you can ask people to record as many ideas for a volunteer project as they can. And then group the ideas that are similar and give each employee an opportunity to vote on their top 3. If they choose, they can put all 3 of their votes on one option. The most votes would be the opportunity you go with first.

Provide reasonable work time to engage in the project as a group.

Once the project is over, ask the team to share what they got out of the experience.

Ask the group to choose which volunteer project they'd wish to participate in next, including the one they just did.

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Practicing non-judgmental interpretations

Approximately 20 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This activity assists team members in developing constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours.

Instructions

In advance of the activity, have the following sentences available to show on a screen (if there is anyone in your group with one of these names, use a different name):

- "Tim's always angry because he's a jerk."
- "Alex's always on the verge of tears because they're such a softie."
- "Dani's always anxious when there are tight deadlines because they're not cut out for their position."

Suggested wording

When we interact with others, especially when they're stressed or emotional, it's natural to try to understand the reasons for their negative emotions and reactions. We are often quite accurate when determining the causes of and contributors to other people's positive emotional states. However, we're less accurate when we judge others' negative emotions, which is unhelpful for open and honest dialogue. To enhance your emotional intelligence, learn to develop a non-judgmental understanding of others, their behaviours and their reactions to situations. One of the traps we may fall into, however, when dealing with negative emotions in the workplace, is making simplistic and judgmental interpretations, such as:

Tim's always angry because he's a jerk.

What reasons do you think could cause somebody to be angry most of the time?

[**Take up the answers from the group. If they don't come up with it, you could add that Tim may be dealing with family or relationship problems, has chronic pain or feels blamed or attacked.**]

Alex is always on the verge of tears because they're such a softie.

What reasons do you think could cause someone to cry often?

[**Take up the answers from the group. If they don't come up with it, you could add that Alex may be experiencing depression or anxiety, has a child who's very ill or fears losing her job.**]

Dani's always anxious when there are tight deadlines because they're not cut out for their position.

[**Take up the answers from the group. If they don't come up with it, you could add that Dani may have perfectionist tendencies that don't serve her well, is unable to express they're frustration about other people not doing their share or they're approaching or are in burnout.**]

When we're aware that our assumptions and judgments about people may not be correct or the entire story, we're less likely to make a judgment about them. This can change our thoughts, our words and our actions to be less harmful and more effective. For each of the examples that we've covered, record a non-judgmental statement about their behaviours. Do this while thinking that you couldn't possibly understand what they're going through.

[**Take up as many answers as you have time for. Then wrap-up with the words below.**]

Spend the rest of the day noticing your thoughts, assumptions and judgments about others. Be aware of how many of these thoughts are objective or factual such as, "Tim is speaking to his co-worker in a loud voice" versus how many are based on subjective or unfounded assumptions or judgments such as, "Tim is a jerk".

Actively work on catching yourself when you have judgmental thoughts and translating them into objective, factual descriptions. This process takes time and practice, but will eventually start to feel natural.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Recognize strengths

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps team members think about and articulate the strengths that others bring to the team. This activity works best in-person.

Materials required

Blank pieces of paper, one for each person.

Instructions

Provide advance notice to team members that you will be doing a team-building activity that will include having each team member share what they value in their co-workers in one sentence or less. (This activity is not recommended for a dysfunctional team. It is intended for an average or good team that may want to improve cohesion.)

1. At the meeting, provide blank pieces of paper to all team members.
2. Ask each team member to write their name in the center of the sheet.
3. Then ask them to circulate their paper to the person to their left.
4. Ask team members to write about a work-related strength or characteristic they value in the team member whose name is on the sheet. Length is no more than one sentence and as little as one word.
5. No one is to sign their name to what they write.
6. Circulate the sheets of paper around until the one with their own name on it arrives back to each person.
7. Ask each person to add one thing they value about themselves as a team member.
8. Once everyone is done, ask each participant to share any one item from their sheet.

If someone would rather pass, allow this.

The objective is to improve each team member's ability to acknowledge the strengths of others, and to become aware of the characteristics others value in them. The effect on a person of seeing the strengths others attribute to them can be quite motivating.

To wrap up, you can instruct people to take their sheet with them and be aware of how they might continue to look for characteristics they value in others. Let them know you may do this activity again in a few months.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton

Acknowledge our accomplishments

About 15-20 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps recognize positive accomplishments that may not otherwise have been acknowledged.

Instructions

Often leaders aren't aware of the "wins" or "successes" of their employees on a day-to-day basis. Having employees record something they're proud of accomplishing at work can be a very effective team building activity.

You could ask employees to do this for themselves daily so they're ready to share at team meetings or one-on-one meetings with you. What this does is shift focus from what might not have gone well to recognizing effort and accomplishments each day.

Suggested wording

Take a moment and record one positive contribution or accomplishment you made in the past week at work.

It can be something big or small. Recognize that some weeks, when you're going through a significant life stressor or a challenging project at work, just showing up to a meeting or getting to work on time could be considered your accomplishment. At other times, your contribution could be helping a co-worker or providing excellent customer service.

[**Use examples that are relevant to your team.**]

Once you have had a moment to record, we'll have each person share one of their accomplishments.

[**Be sure to acknowledge each person's contribution as they share. When everyone is done, wrap-up.**]

Thank you for sharing your contributions and accomplishments, it's important to understand that even on days that it seems like nothing is going right, we're still making an effort. With all of us focusing on our own jobs, we may sometimes miss the efforts and accomplishments of others. This is why we want to share our accomplishments on a regular basis and recognize each other's efforts.

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Microaggressions

10 minutes

Learning objective

To understand and avoid microaggressions.

Preparation

In advance of the meeting, send each participant the worksheet on the following page for a virtual meeting or print one for each participant for an in-person meeting. You can also download it from **clwsmh.com/resources/microaggressions-ws**.

Instructions

For this activity you want participants to come to their own conclusion about how these microaggressions may become problematic and what they may do about it. When you take up the answers, you want to reinforce the ideas below.

- Asking, "Where are you really from?" after someone has told you where they're from
  - → **What to do instead:** Nothing
- Assuming you know a person's language or their racial identity based on their appearance
  - → **What to do instead:** Ask, "Do you speak any other languages?" or say nothing
- Assuming gender expression, mis-gendering (even if unintentional) or stating, "You don't look trans."
  - → **What to do instead:** Ask for the person's preferred pronouns and honour them at all times

Suggested wording

At their core, microaggressions can feel like a subtle form of nation. Yet they are usually indirect and unintentional and therefore unlikely to meet the criteria for discrimination under human rights legislation. We are not learning this today as a form of risk management. We are learning this today to improve civility and respect for everyone.

Microaggressions are often based on differences in skin colour, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation. Implicit bias can occur without face-to-face interaction. For example, the choice of images or written language can show bias. Microaggressions are more likely to occur through passive remarks and actions.

It's completely possible that we could unintentionally engage in microaggressions. This is especially true when we're unaware of our own implicit bias. We may think our comments or actions are harmless when in fact they can have a significant negative impact on others.

In your handout are a series of potential microaggressions. Consider how each action may feel like discrimination or cause someone to feel uncomfortable. Also decide what you could do or

say instead to get the intended message across with less likelihood of offending. I will give you 3 minutes to work on this individually and then I'll ask if anyone will volunteer some of their answers.

[**After 3 minutes.**]

Is there anyone who would like to share an idea from any of the examples that would be especially effective at avoiding a microaggression?

[**After 3 minutes, or you have no more volunteers, move on. If no one wishes to share, you can use the examples in the instructions to give some suggestions. You can wrap up with the following.**]

As you can see, some of these microaggressions are things that we might not identify as potentially harmful, but as the author Maya Angelou said, "When we know better, we can do better."

On the second page of your handout is a 3-step approach to help you respond if you witness bias or a microaggression in the workplace.

First you need to identify what you saw or heard and state it in a respectful way to those involved. For example, if you heard "where are you really from?" you might say, "they just told you."

The second step is re-framing why you think the exchange may be hurtful to others without shaming the person who said it. In this example you might ask, "Why don't you believe their first response?" Give people the benefit of the doubt. They may not be aware of their own bias.

The third step happens after the exchange to help everyone better understand the issue. This could be done privately with the person who spoke up or as a general education opportunity with an entire team without singling anyone out.

Activity developed with help from: Mardi Daley, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Microaggressions

Microaggressions take place when a person indirectly, subtly or unintentionally discriminates. They're based on differences in race, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Implicit bias can occur without a face-to-face interaction. For example, the choice of images or written language can show bias. Microaggressions are more likely to occur through passive remarks and actions.

Where are you really from?

How could this question make someone feel uncomfortable?

What could be a better approach?

You don't look trans

How could this statement make someone feel uncomfortable?

What could be a better approach?

He's acting bipolar

How could this statement make someone feel uncomfortable?

What could be a better approach?

She must be on her period

How could this statement make someone feel uncomfortable?

What could be a better approach?

3-step approach to addressing bias and microaggressions in the workplace

If you witness bias or a microaggression in the workplace:



Identify

State to those involved what you saw or heard. Do this respectfully and with the intention to objectively reflect what you witnessed rather than adding in your opinion about the intent. For example, if you heard “where are you really from?” you might say, “they just told you.”



Reframe the narrative

Share why you think the exchange may be hurtful to some people. This is an opportunity for respectful dialogue. Give people the benefit of the doubt. They may not be aware of their own bias and the person on the other end may not have been offended in the least. By approaching this as a conversation instead of an accusation, you will find that people are much less likely to become defensive. In this example you might ask, “Why don’t you believe their first response?”



Educate

The more everyone understands the issues, the more they can avoid bias. Ask questions especially of those who may experience implicit bias. Seek to understand their experiences. Pursue professional development opportunities that focus on inclusion. This could be done privately with the person who spoke up or as a general education opportunity with an entire team without singling anyone out.

If you’re interested in doing more work in this area, check out **clwsmh.com/implicit-bias** on the Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website.

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Intersectionality

20 minutes

Learning objective

Intersectionality focuses on the overlap of various social identities one person may hold. This activity can help reveal areas where we may hold unconscious bias towards particular groups.

Preparation

In advance of the meeting, send each participant the worksheet on the following page for a virtual meeting or print one for each participant for an in-person meeting. You can also download it from **clwsmh.com/resources/intersectionality-ws**.

Suggested wording

Intersectionality focuses on the overlap of the various social identities one person would hold. This can include skin colour, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class.

Different combinations may increase or decrease the likelihood that you will experience systemic oppression and discrimination.

For example, you may consider a white male to be in the majority in your workplace, but if a white male is also gay, the intersection of his sexual orientation may increase the likelihood that he will face discrimination.

In your handout is a list of social identities.

Focusing only on the first column, I'd like you to name your intersection in each group. For example, under gender, state the gender in which you identify with. In skin colour, put down how you would describe yourself. You will not be asked to share any of this, it's simply to help you identify your own intersections.

[You can ask participants to let you know when they're finished. If you're doing the activity face-to-face you can ask the participants to put down their pens. If you're facilitating this virtually, you can ask participants raise their hands or whatever method is available through your platform.]

In the next column in your handout, identify which of your social identities are part of the majority at work. Consider those you interact with on a regular basis and count if the number of people who have the same intersection as you are more or less than 50%. If the majority share that particular intersection, check the box in that row. You have one minute.

[**After one minute.**]

Whenever an intersection is shared by the majority, it's easier for implicit bias against those not in this group to go unnoticed.

In one workshop, a participant said they would not know if anyone at work is gay because they would never ask. Since there were approximately 1000 employees in the workplace, statistically

speaking there would have been around 100 people who were gay. The participant was asked if people at work ever talked about heterosexual experiences related to husbands, wives, wedding anniversaries or pregnancies. Of course, the answer was yes.

In this workplace, it's likely that those who are gay just remained silent and excluded from these conversations. By thinking more inclusively, we can expand our conversations to validate and acknowledge other social identities.

In this example, simply talking about a same sex wedding that you attended or a same sex couple with children can make the conversation more inclusive. It doesn't mean that everyone within that social identity will speak out but it does mean that they are more likely to feel included in the conversation.

By now I hope you have some idea of what implicit bias and microaggressions are.

In the next column, I want you to think about potential acts of implicit bias towards the social identities in your workplace that are not part of the majority. This requires you to first identify the minority social identities in each category and then to list a few potential microaggressions or acts of implicit bias.

You do not have to have witnessed this, just imagine what they might experience. While there may be several other social identities in each category, you are thinking generally about those at work who are in the minority. Let me give you a few examples:

An Asian person who was third generation Canadian had people move away from them during the pandemic because they were assumed to be more contagious than others. The implicit bias was being shunned or excluded and presumed to be a foreigner.

A Canadian of East Indian descent was detained at the airport 9 times out of 10, while the average is less than 3 times out of 10 for random selection. The implicit bias resulted in having to always spend more time at the airport because someone thought they looked like a person who might be engaged in criminal activity.

A highly qualified person who is non-binary and dresses differently than the majority is told they are not management material because they won't command respect. The implicit bias is being judged by their looks rather than their capabilities. You now have 3 minutes to complete this column.

[**After 3 minutes.**]

Hopefully this exercise helped you to think through some of the experiences of those in the workplace who are in the minority. If you have a relationship with any one in these groups ask them what their experience has been with implicit bias or microaggressions. You may be surprised.

Now I want you to think about the people you hang out with when you are not working. For each of the categories, record the various social identities that are not part of your social circle.

To be included in your social circle means you interact with them at least 6 times a year outside of work. Also ask yourself why nobody from these particular identities are included in your social circle. As with the rest of the questions, you won't be asked to share your answers. You have 3 minutes.

[**After 3 minutes.**]

Hopefully by now you will have more awareness of the unconscious bias that is unique to you.

Activity developed with help from: Mardi Daley, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Intersectionality

Intersectionality focuses on the overlap of the various social identities one person would hold. This can include skin colour, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class. Different combinations may increase or decrease the likelihood that you will experience systemic oppression and discrimination.

What intersections do you have?

Please fill in the table as instructed

Social identities	Name your intersection in each group	Check where you are in the majority at work	What could constitute implicit bias towards those who are in the minority at work?	Which groups are not currently in your personal social circle? Why not?
Ability e.g. Physically disabled, mentally disabled, chronic pain		☐		
Age e.g. Under 10, 20 – 30, 60 – 80		☐		
Body type E.g. average, athletic, obese		☐		
Culture e.g. Latino, Indigenous, African American		☐		
Education level E.g. No formal education, High school, PhD		☐		
Ethnicity e.g. Italian, African, Asian		☐		
Family status e.g. Married, single parent, widowed		☐		

Social identities	Name your intersection in each group	Check where you are in the majority at work	What could constitute implicit bias towards those who are in the minority at work?	Which groups are not currently in your personal social circle? Why not?
Gender e.g. Non-binary, trans, male, female		☐		
Income level e.g. Low, middle, high		☐		
Job role e.g. Management, union rep, frontline		☐		
Nationality e.g. Japanese, British, Mexican		☐		
Political affiliations e.g. Far right, far left, centrist		☐		
Religion e.g. Buddhist, Muslim, Jain		☐		
Sexual orientation e.g. Gay, lesbian, bisexual		☐		
Skin colour E.g. Brown, white, black		☐		

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Notes



4

Self-awareness



The more we learn about ourselves, the more tolerant and respectful we can be of others.

This is because when we're able to accept our flaws as well as our strengths, we're less likely to hold others to impossible standards. In addition, when we learn about how different values and perspectives can contribute to the success of an entire team, we learn to appreciate differences.

The following activities can help team members improve self-awareness:

Identify your communication styles

Have team members think about interaction styles when under stress to help develop more effective behaviour.

Identify your values

Articulate core values to identify goals and understand behaviours.

Identify your strengths

Think about specific ways to build strengths.

What were you thinking?

Change external behaviour to better reflect intention.

Interpret negative feedback accurately

Interpret feedback more accurately by avoiding assumptions about the intent.

Communicate with clarity

In this fun activity, the team will learn how to communicate without their message being misinterpreted.

React to change

Develop awareness of how we react to change.

Relevant resources

Emotional intelligence for employees

These activities can help develop your emotional intelligence, including monitoring your impact on others, managing your stress and responding more effectively to others.

Health resources

Choose credible and practical information and resources to help you manage your own health and wellness and help others.

Mental health at work

Use these tools and resources to help improve employee well-being.

Prevent burnout

Strategies to help identify risks and prevent burnout for yourself.

Resilience

Use this resource to help improve your ability to bounce back if faced with a health, personal or work crisis. It will help you identify effective strategies and resources to draw on when needed.

Self-awareness for emotional intelligence

Improve your ability to accurately identify your emotions, understand why you react the way you do, and recognize the impact you have on others.

Self-management for emotional intelligence

Improve your ability to effectively regulate stress and appropriately express emotional reactions, whether alone or with others.

Identify your communication styles

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team activity allows team members to think about their interaction styles when under stress.

Preparation

Send a link to **Monitor your communication style** (**clwsmh.com/resources/monitor-your-communication-style**) to all participants and ask them to read this in advance and identify when they use each of the 4 communication styles.

Suggested wording

When placed in stressful or taxing situation, we often gravitate toward our own default style of communication. Even emotionally intelligent individuals may find that certain situations can prompt them to use a less helpful communication style. These responses can damage relationships and our team's effectiveness. In today's activity we're learning about both ourselves and other's communication styles and when and why these may show up. You were sent the descriptors of each of the 4 communication styles and asked to identify when you might use each of them.
I'll start with my answers and ask all of you to contribute yours. Let's begin with passive behaviours which is when we don't express what we're actually feeling or thinking even when we have strong opinions about what's being said or done.

[**Some examples are given below or you can use your own.**]

I may use passive communication when I feel like my opinion will be dismissed or ridiculed. It may be easier to just keep my mouth shut.

Now I'd like everyone else to share when you may use a passive communication style.

[**If doing this virtually, you can have participants put their answers in the chat. If doing it in a group that is more timid, you can have them write it on small pieces of paper without their names to hand in to be read. In a group that is more comfortable with each other, you can have each person share.**]

The next communication style is aggressive. An aggressive style is when I interrupt, speak loudly or talk over others.

I may use aggressive communication when I'm frustrated, overwhelmed or feel like I'm not being understood.

Now I'd like everyone else to share when you may use an aggressive communication style.

The next communication style is passive-aggressive. A passive-aggressive style often uses non-verbal communication such as eye-rolling, heavy sighing or ignoring others. It can include deliberately frustrating or sarcastic verbal responses.

I may use passive-aggressive communication when I feel unsafe or uncomfortable saying what I really think. I may fear rejection.

Now I'd like everyone else to share when you may use a passive-aggressive communication style.

The fourth communication style is assertive. This is when we're open, straightforward and respectful when we communicate. Of course, this is the ideal and a sign of high emotional intelligence. But the reality is that none of us communicate in this way all the time. The purpose of this activity is for us to think objectively about why someone may be communicating in a way passive, aggressive or passive-aggressive. By understanding this about ourselves and why we might communicate that way, we can be less judgmental when others communicate in that way sometimes.

A useful exercise going forward is to catch yourself communicating in any style other than assertive and look at the reasons that you've shared today so you can understand what might be motivating the communication style for you in that moment.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra

Notes

Identify your values

Approximately 40 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team activity helps team members to articulate core values to identify goals and understand behaviours.

Preparation

In advance of the meeting, send each participant the worksheet on the next page. You can also download it from **clwsmh.com/resources/identify-your-values-ws**.

Have your own top 3 values identified as well as the explanation of how and why you value them in your role. For example, if you value purpose it may be that you always need to know why you're doing something not just how. If you value power, you need to feel that you have the authority, knowledge and resources available to do your job without someone looking over your shoulder.

Suggested wording

Our values impact all facets of our lives and the many roles we play such as friend, partner, parent or employee. Values shape our goals, behaviours, and how we react.

Values change over the course of our lifetimes, and may even differ between our various roles and responsibilities. The priorities we place on different values also vary over time.

It can be helpful to identify the workplace values that are important to you today, and contemplate how they relate to your goals as a team member. Articulating your core values can also serve as a valuable frame of reference for those inevitable moments where the values you hold dear are being compromised. When this happens, we're likely to feel uncomfortable or agitated.

One example could be if I value quality of work and you value getting things done, we could clash when I think you're moving too fast and you think I'm moving too slow. When we can recognize that neither of us are wrong, we just hold different values, we could collaborate to try to find the most effective way to reach a reasonable quality of work in the fastest time possible. This means we're no longer fighting against each other's values but trying to align with both. As we go around to share what we value in our role, please be thinking about how we can respect the values of our team members in our day-to-day work. I will start with my top value, and encourage you not to copy me but be honest about what your values are so that we can all learn.

[**Name your top value and why you value them in your role. Then ask each of the participants to do the same.**]

As I said in the beginning, values can change over time. So, we may do this activity again but the next time you see someone reacting defensively, ask yourself which of their values you may have stomped on. Because often this is what causes people to react emotionally to a request or statement.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton

Identify your values

Read through the following values and circle those that are most important to you at the present moment. For each of the values you circle, identify why it is important to you in your current role.

Value	I value this in my role because...
Acceptance	
Accuracy	
Achievement	
Authority	
Autonomy	
Caring	
Challenge	
Comfort	
Commitment	
Compassion	
Contribution	
Cooperation	
Courtesy	
Creativity	
Dependability	
Duty	
Family	
Flexibility	
Forgiveness	

Value	I value this in my role because...
Friendship	
Fun	
Genuineness	
Growth	
Honesty	
Humour	
Independence	
Industry	
Justice	
Knowledge	
Mastery	
Openness	
Order	
Power	
Purpose	
Rationality	
Responsibility	
Safety	
Self-control	
Stability	
Tolerance	

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Identify your strengths

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This activity helps team members to identify and think about specific ways to build their strengths.

Preparation

Send the link to the **VIA strengths inventory** (**www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register**) to participants to complete in advance or alternatively give them 15 minutes at the beginning of your session to do so.

Instructions

After explaining strengths using the suggested wording, you'll have each person identify their top 3 strengths and how those can be used in the workplace. The intention is to be aware of how we can leverage strengths in times of stress or challenge.

Every person has all 24-character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. You can discover your personal character strengths profile by taking the free scientifically validated VIA Survey. It'll take you approximately 15 minutes. There's no need to purchase the full report to learn about your top strengths for this activity.

The VIA Character Strengths Survey is part of a research project, so you'll need to provide personal information, including your name and email address for research purposes.

Suggested wording

When we talk about a person's character, we mean the sum total of who that person is: how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours shape who they are, how they see the world and how they interact with the people around them. Every person has character strengths. These are positive qualities that are part of who we are and come naturally to us. It's much easier for us to use our strengths during times of adversity than to try and manage our weaknesses.

For example, if patience isn't your strength, trying to be patient when faced with a delay in a work project isn't easy. On the other hand, if creativity is a strength, distracting yourself from the stress and frustration of waiting while you begin a new, creative project might be helpful.

We all have many character strengths but we don't all have the same ones to the same degree. For example, while everyone has curiosity, it's stronger in some people than in others. Also any strength can be overused to the point of being a problem. Using the example of curiosity, not enough can make life boring – too much can make you seem nosy or intrusive.

Using your results from the VIA Survey write down your top 3 strengths.

[At the end of this activity is a list of VIA character strengths you can share in case someone was unable to complete the online VIA Survey.]

Now, for each of your top 3 strengths ask yourself the question, “How can I use this strength to help me deal with stress and challenges?”

For example:

If your strength is forgiveness, you could answer the question with, “Because I prefer mercy and not revenge, it’s easier to move on, even when someone hurts me.”

If your strength is love-of-learning, you could answer the question with, “When things go wrong, know I can examine the situation and learn a new way of going forward.”

If your strength is bravery, you could answer the question with, “Even when I’m opposed by many, I’m able to do what I think is right.”

[**To facilitate sharing you could have each person share one strength and how they’d use it or you could read out each strength and ask if anyone has it, and how they’d use it.**]

[**When your time is up, wrap up by saying the following:**]

Because our strengths are naturally easier for us than our weaknesses, they’re more readily available during times of stress. When we understand how to use our strengths to deal with stress, we can intentionally draw on them to deal with our challenges. As you go through your week, recognize when you’re using your strengths and how they help you to deal with stress.

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

VIA character strengths

The following is the list of 24-character strengths identified by the VIA Institute on Character. www.viacharacter.org

Wisdom	**Creativity**	Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are.
	Curiosity	You like exploration and discovery.
	Judgment	You think things through and examine them from all sides.
	Love of learning	You have a passion for mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge.
	Perspective	People who know you consider you wise.
Courage	**Bravery**	You don't shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain.
	Honesty	You live your life in a genuine and authentic way.
	Perseverance	You work hard to finish what you start.
	Zest	You approach everything you do with excitement and energy.
Humanity	**Kindness**	You're kind and generous to others.
	Love	You value close relations with others.
	Social Intelligence	You know how to fit in to different social situations.
Justice	**Fairness**	One of your abiding principles is to treat all people fairly.
	Leadership	You excel at encouraging a group to get things done.
	Teamwork	You excel as a member of a group.
Temperance	**Forgiveness**	You forgive those who have done you wrong.
	Humility	You don't seek the spotlight. Others recognize and value your modesty.
	Prudence	You're a careful person.
	Self regulation	You're a disciplined person.
Transcendence	**Appreciation of beauty**	You notice and appreciate beauty and excellence in all domains of life.
	Gratitude	You're aware of good things that happen and don't take them for granted.
	Hope	You expect the best in the future and you work to achieve it.
	Humour	Bringing smiles to other people is important to you.
	Spirituality	Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.

What were you thinking?

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This activity helps team members consider how their external behaviour can better reflect internal intent.

Instructions

You will introduce the session and then have a different person read one example at a time. You'll then ask the question and take up a few responses, then move to the next example.

Suggested wording

Don't believe everything you think. Our mind likes to make us believe that our thoughts are facts, even when they're inaccurate. This can make it difficult to enjoy and appreciate certain things in life. From personal insecurities to environmental factors, anything can affect how we think and see our thoughts.

I'm going to ask someone to read each of the different thought distortions. We'll then explore how we might turn that thought distortion into something that's more true. Each of these are types of thoughts any of us can experience. As we review them, consider how you might be able to challenge these thoughts and approach them differently. Challenging thoughts is not the same as thinking happy thoughts about something that doesn't make you happy. We want to be realistic, reasonable and objective with our thoughts.

When something is all good or all bad

- Why this matters. If you think something isn't perfect, your mind makes you see it negatively.
- Doing it differently. Consider where you did well and where you could improve on your task. By doing this, we acknowledge that we make mistakes and that everything we do does not have to be perfect. However, this gives us the opportunity to try new things with less fear. We understand that we will learn and see where we can improve.
- Question. You have completed a report and found 2 typos after you sent it to your boss. Rather than seeing the report or yourself as a failure, what would be a more reasonable thought? How could you test this thought?

Making negative assumptions

- Why this matters. When we conclude that someone's intention or motivation is negative, even an innocent comment or kind gesture can be viewed with suspicion. This can lead to misunderstandings and conflict that are unnecessary.
- Doing it differently. Don't let your mind get stuck on the negative and make assumptions that haven't happened yet or may not happen at all. Look at the full situation from a logical point of view – both positive and negative - before assuming the worst.
- Question. A colleague hasn't responded to your email asking for help with something, your first thought is they're annoyed or don't like me. What would a more reasonable thought be? How could you test this thought?

Stop deflecting, start reflecting

- Why this matters. When others compliment you on something, you immediately deflect it while also casting doubt on yourself.
- Doing it differently. Next time you receive praise, notice the first thoughts in your mind. Reflect on the content of your thoughts and learn to understand why your mind leads you to think this way. Allowing yourself to accept more feedback that is positive can boost your self-esteem and encourage positive thinking.
- Question. Someone has said you're looking great today and your immediate thought is I look a mess, they're just saying that to be polite. What would a more reasonable thought be? How could you test this thought?

Should I feel guilty?

- Why this matters. You have an ideal of what you should say or do in all situations and may feel guilty for not following through perfectly all the time.
- Doing it differently. Change how you judge yourself, so you don't feel pressured to be perfect. Guilt can cause you to feel stuck; therefore, think instead about what the guilt is telling you to do and what not to do. If you feel bad about hurting someone's feelings, let them know how you are feeling. You may find that they never gave it another thought. If it is true that you hurt someone, apologize as soon as possible so you can make it right. If you cannot apologize find a way to make someone else or some other situation better as a way to address and eliminate the guilt.
- Question. Your colleague sent you a text asking for help and you read it but then got distracted and forgot to respond. You're feeling bad about making them feel dismissed or ignored. What would a more reasonable thought be? How could you test this thought?

It's not your fault

- Why this matters. You self-blame for starting negative events that you could not control and/or think that negative feelings you experience result in current events in life.
- Doing it differently. Don't put too much blame on yourself, especially for things that you can't control. Take these negative thoughts and emotions as an opportunity to reflect. Why do you feel this way? How do your feelings relate to your current situation? Instead of self-blame, encourage yourself through self-boosts of positivity to help you get through these events or emotions.
- Rather than asking another question, I want you to check out these resources related to your circle of Influence and control (**www.thensomehow.com/circles-of-influence** or **dplearningzone.the-dp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Covey.pdf**). These tools help with what control you have and what control you don't have.

I'll leave you with this to do on your own. If you encounter these types of thoughts, try to approach them differently with these tips. The goal is to develop healthier and more positive thinking.

Activity developed with help from: Trinelle Brown

Interpret negative feedback accurately

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team activity helps team members to learn how to interpret feedback accurately by focusing on its constructive intent and keeping it in perspective.

Suggested wording

When we learn to see feedback as information about something we did or didn't do, rather than an attack on our person, we can be more objective about how we receive it. If we're curious rather than defensive, we can think about what we can do differently. This doesn't mean we agree with the feedback, but we're open to exploring the possibilities.

Negative feedback often feels bad because we tend to make assumptions about what the other person's saying. These assumptions make up the story we tell ourselves about the person's motives or intentions. It can be helpful to train yourself to focus only on the words being said. Don't assume the other person is trying to convey a hidden message. If you focus on the subject of the feedback – the behaviour or task – rather than taking it as a personal attack, you'll be in a better position to clarify, learn and grow from it.

For example, if you get feedback that, "The quality of your last report was lower than what I'm used to seeing from you," it can be tempting to interpret this as:

- They think I'm terrible at what I do
- They're disappointed in me
- They want to fire me

Alternatively, the story we tell ourselves could be about our own feelings of shame or guilt including:

- I'll never get this right
- I'm a failure
- I don't deserve this job

Unfortunately, our assumptions may be overly negative and inaccurate. It's easy for us to take feedback about a small flaw in an otherwise good project and blow it out of proportion into a comment about our overall ineffectiveness.

What we need to do is challenge the story we tell ourselves and instead look for what we can learn from the feedback. For example, rather than making up a story about what the other person is thinking, ask the question, **"What do I need to do differently to meet or exceed your expectations the next time?"** and **"How will you measure success the next time?"** Getting this clarity, rather than reacting with emotion, will help you learn and grow.

If your response is personal shame, guilt or humiliation, you may want to ask yourself, "Did I do the best I could with the information and resources I had?" and "Could I do this more effectively?" If you know you did the best you could, you don't need to feel shame or guilt. No one is perfect, especially when they're learning new skills. The only way to improve is to try again with new information.

When you see feedback as information you need, you can interpret it more accurately. When feedback is not fair or accurate, ask these same questions rather than becoming defensive. This will help you clarify the feedback without challenging the other person.

I'm going to give you three examples of feedback. Record the negative assumptions you could make if someone said this to you.

- Your co-worker finds it challenging to engage you in problem-solving conversations
- Your project came in over budget
- Your report needs to be rewritten

Now, record what you might intend or mean if you gave this feedback to someone you respect.

[**Take up answers both about the negative assumption and what they'd mean if they were giving this feedback. Take up as many answers as you can before you wrap up with the following.**]

In each of these examples, it's possible to go to extremes in terms of our negative assumptions of what is intended. We may feel that the other person is saying we're antisocial, careless with money or sloppy in our reports. When we give feedback to someone else, however, we may say the same words, but mean that co-workers want to talk with them more, we need to re-examine the budget for the next project or the purpose of the report has changed. In both cases, the only way we can know the other person's intention is to ask clarifying questions: "**What do I need to do differently to meet or exceed your expectations the next time?**" and "**How will you measure success the next time?**"

The next time you receive negative feedback, be aware of your assumptions. Try to actively catch your assumptions and ask clarifying questions so you can get the information you need to learn and grow from the feedback.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra

Notes

Communicate with clarity

20 minutes

Learning objective

In this fun activity, the team will learn how to communicate without their message being misinterpreted.

Preparation

Have the following phrases on a screen or flipchart:

- David, don't you understand?
- What do you need from me?
- I never said you did that.

Suggested wording

Communication is much more than just the words we say. The intensity with which we deliver our messages impacts how others interpret them. Intensity shows up in the:

- Volume of our voice
- Muscle tension in our face and body
- Pace of our words
- Words we choose to emphasize

Careless communication is saying whatever's on our mind without thinking about how others might receive it. When we communicate clearly, we consider both our verbal and our non-verbal messaging. We can avoid the damage done by careless communication when we consistently monitor how intensely we communicate.

I am going to ask for a volunteer for the first activity. Is there someone who is comfortable reading?

[Select a volunteer to read.]

The first example of how our intensity can impact the way our message is interpreted is volume.

I am going to ask our volunteer to read one of the phrases displayed out loud 3 times. The first-time reading with a whisper, the second time with their regular voice and lastly with a loud voice.

First read the phrase out loud in a whisper.

[After they've done this.]

Now I want you to say the same sentence in your regular voice.

[After they've done this.]

Finally, I want you to say it in a loud voice.

[After they've done this.]

How might the different volumes impact the way the same message is interpreted?

[Allow for answers and then move on.]

When we speak very loudly, others may think we're angry or excited. When we lower our voice, others may think we're being threatening or timid depending on the tone.

The next example of how our intensity can impact the way our message is interpreted is the muscle tension in our face and body.

I am going to ask for another volunteer to read one of the phrases displayed 3 times.

[Select a volunteer.]

First, read the phrase out loud while you relax the muscles of your face.

[After they've done this.]

Now I want you to say the same sentence with a clenched jaw.

[**After they've done this.**]

Finally, I want you to say it while tensing all the muscles of your body and leaning forward.

[**After they've done this.**]

How does muscle tension impact the way the same message is interpreted?

[**Allow for answers and then move on.**]

When we're physically tense, others may think we're stressed or excited. When we lean in close, they may think we're being aggressive.

The next example of how our intensity can impact the way our message is interpreted is the pace of our words.

Could I get another volunteer to read for the next example?

[**Select a volunteer.**]

This time, first read the phrases out loud very slowly, the second time at a regular rate and lastly read the phrases out loud quickly.

First read the phrase out very slowly.

[**After they've done this.**]

Now I want you to say the same sentence at a regular pace.

[**After they've done this.**]

Finally, I want you to say it very quickly.

[**After they've done this.**]

How does the rate of our words impact the way the same message is interpreted?

[**Allow for answers and then move on.**]

When we speak quickly, others may think we're being domineering or not open to discussion. When we respond quickly, we could be interrupting. When we speak very slowly, they may think we're being condescending or threatening depending on your tone.

The fourth example of how our intensity can impact the way our message is interpreted is which words we choose to emphasize.

Changing the emphasis of a single word in a sentence can completely change how people interpret what you mean.

For instance, in the phrase "I don't know"

[**Please place emphasis on the word that is bold in each case.**]

"I don't know" without any particular emphasis probably– implies that you don't know.

"I don't know" with emphasis on the "I" – might imply that you don't feel you're responsible.

"I **don't** know" with emphasis on "don't" – might imply frustration. You don't want to be asked the question or you feel they should already know the answer.

"I don't **know**" with emphasis on "know" might– imply that you haven't made up your mind.

"I don't know" with emphasis on all words will probably imply anger or annoyance.

Now you can try with the other phrases we've been using. Try to say each phrase multiple times where you are changing which word is emphasized. Notice how the phrase may be interpreted differently.

[**Allow some time for participants to do the activity. And then wrap up**]

While the words we choose and our body language matter, so too does the intensity with which we deliver the message.

The next time you're going into a discussion in which your emotions could become intense, consider how you'll manage the:

- Volume of your voice
- Muscle tension in your face and body
- Pace of your words
- Words you choose to emphasize

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

React to change

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity can help develop awareness of how we react to change.

Instructions

Prior to the meeting, you may wish to personally review a change process/cycle model, to be familiar with basic steps and issues at each stage. An example is the **SlideShare of William Bridges': Managing Transition** (www.slideshare.net/rgiannic/william-bridges-managing-transitions).

Do not share in advance what this activity is about. At the meeting, once everyone has taken their seats, ask team members to get up and change chairs. Don't look them in the eye or give any explanation. If they ask, just say they must move to any seat other than the one they were in, and they should take their things with them.

If you're doing this virtually, you might consider giving everyone a new link to a different online learning space as above, don't give any explanation. If they ask why, just say that it's necessary.

Once everyone is back, ask for volunteers to share what they felt or experienced during or after the request to change seats.

Suggested wording

I want you to think about what you thought or felt when you were forced to change chairs [**or meeting space**]. Having change thrust upon us with little or no explanation can be stressful. We may feel resentment, annoyance or something else.

OK, let's have each person share what they experienced when forced to change without knowing why.

Instructions

You could link what the group shares to the various steps in William Bridges' change process/cycle model.

The purpose of this activity is to convey ideas to help team members manage change in the workplace. These may include the notions that:

- Change is rarely straightforward. It is often complex and messy.
- Change can take time, and patience is important.
- Change can cause anxiety. It's important to share and demonstrate an understanding of our fears and concerns, to help reduce this anxiety.
- Sometimes it can be helpful to explore possibilities and take reasonable risks.
- We do not all react the same way to change.

Suggested wording

There are two things to consider here – we need to do our best to prepare people for change and explain the purpose of the change. The other is that we can be aware of our own stress related to change and take steps to seek clarity, in order to gain a better sense of control.

Activity developed with help from: William Pallett

Notes



5

Emotional intelligence



The benefits of building emotional intelligence and resilience among team members in the workplace can be significant.

This includes having greater capacity to adapt and cope with work and life stressors, making it easier to recover from challenges and setbacks.

The activities in this chapter can help team members become more aware of how their emotions impact their behaviour and how they might react to the emotions of others:

The function of emotions

Examine exactly what an emotional response may be communicating.

Emotional triggers

Understand emotional triggers and how they may impact different situations.

Anger as a symptom

Examine situations where anger is a “secondary emotion” of an underlying “primary emotion”.

Express anger constructively

Express anger constructively to minimize problematic circumstances in the future.

Deal with worry

Reduce worry about work and replace it with effective problem solving.

Relevant resources

Building resilience workshop

Participants engage in a journey of self–discovery while creating a plan to improve their resilience and developing healthy coping strategies for whatever life throws at them.

Emotional intelligence for employees

These activities can help develop your emotional intelligence, including monitoring your impact on others, managing your stress and responding more effectively to others.

Emotional intelligence self-assessment

This free tool can help you improve your self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management.

Emotional intelligence workshop

This workshop helps participants understand their own emotional triggers, explore the functions of emotions, reflect on when behaviours are a symptom of emotions and respond more effectively to the emotions of others.

Resilience

Use this resource to help improve your ability to bounce back if faced with a health, personal or work crisis. It will help you identify effective strategies and resources to draw on when needed.

The function of emotions

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This activity allows team members to examine different ranges of emotional responses and what functions they may serve.

Preparation

In advance of the activity, prepare the following to display on a screen or flip-chart.

Emotions have wisdom

1. Emotions **drive our actions** – for example, a fight, flight or freeze response.
2. Emotions **communicate to others** what we may be experiencing and that we may need support.
3. Emotions **tell us something important** in our life is changing or needs attention.

Suggested wording

Emotions – even those that feel unpleasant or seem negative – can serve several important functions. Some of the main functions are that:

Emotions **drive our actions** – for example, a fight, flight or freeze response. In each case, if you deny or shove away the emotion, you won't be able to tap into the information it has for you. You'll also likely have a harder time moving forward.

Emotions **communicate to others** what we may be experiencing and that we may need support.

Emotions **tell us something important** in our life is changing or needs attention. We may need to change our own thoughts or attitudes. Or we may need to change something in our relationships or environment.

We all may find that we are less effective at work when we ignore or deny our emotions. It doesn't mean we need to be unprofessional or emotional all day. It does mean that we need to be aware of the information our own emotions may be communicating to us. For example, someone may be surprised to find themselves reacting angrily when invited to a special event. Upon further reflection, they may realize that the anger reaction is telling them they're overcommitted and should reconsider their work/life balance, at least temporarily.

This ability to recognize and assess your own responses is part of emotional intelligence. There's a lot of wisdom in all emotions, including those you think are negative. Often, ignoring negative emotions means that they come back again and again. When we examine the wisdom, our emotions can teach us, we'll be more likely to move forward in a healthy way.

If you're feeling angry, there's probably something you feel isn't fair, and you need to identify what it is.

Think of a time where you were angry at work and it served you well because you were able to address something that was not fair. Record the situation including what function this emotion served for you.

[**After giving time for participants to record their answer, have a few people share.**]

Even if our anger is not justified because we did not have all the facts, using this emotion to set things straight (rather than become hostile or aggressive) is a useful function of the emotion of anger.

If you're feeling anxious, there's probably something you need to face or address. This could be something from your past, something in your present or something you're worrying will happen in the future.

Think of a time where you were anxious at work and it served you well because you were able to identify something that needed to be addressed. Record the situation including what function this emotion served for you.

[**After giving time for participants to record their answer, have a few people share.**]

Anxiety can slow us down, create fear or make us doubt ourselves. But it can also be a useful emotion when we stop long enough to consider the source and potential solutions.

If you're feeling sad, there's probably something you need to let go of, such as a relationship, a dream or a goal. Sadness is often wishing things were different than they are. We don't have to accept everything as it is, but when we let go of the impossible or improbable, we can integrate the loss and move forward toward what is possible now.

Think of a time where you were sad at work and it served you well because you resolved to let go of what you felt was lost and set your sights on new goals or dreams. Record the situation including what function this emotion served for you.

[**After giving time for participants to record their answer, have a few people share and then wrap up**]

The point of this activity is to see that all of our emotions have value. Sometimes our behaviours as a result of those emotions can be less than helpful. By valuing the wisdom of emotions and tapping into the information they provide, you step back from reacting to thoughtful consideration of what you need to do or learn. This is emotional intelligence at work.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Emotional triggers

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This activity helps us understand our own emotional triggers in order to choose an effective response rather than react to the emotion.

Preparation

In advance of the meeting, send each participant the worksheet on the following pages. You can also download it from **clwsmh.com/resources/emotional-triggers-ws**.

Suggested wording

Triggers are automatic responses to specific stimuli. Triggers can be people, places or things, as well as smells, words or colours. Emotional triggers are automatic responses to the way others express emotions, like anger or sadness.

For example, you may not have a problem interacting with an angry person, but find it hard to deal with someone who's crying. The opposite may be true for others.

Emotional triggers always stir up our own emotional response. For example, if we almost always react with extreme discomfort when someone else cries, then crying is an emotional trigger. If we don't always respond to anger with our own emotion unless we are in danger, anger isn't a trigger.

Triggers are connected to our thoughts, experiences and memories. We connect a previous interaction with a similar emotional trigger to the current situation at hand.

If you were afraid of clowns when you were a child, seeing a clown now can trigger the emotion of fear. It doesn't have anything to do with the particular person in the clown costume. Instead, the clown brings up your memories and thoughts of a past experience.

We're more likely to blame the situation or person if we don't understand why we react the way we do. For example, we may say the clown is creepy, but there's nothing creepy about the person in the clown costume.

- Before our emotions arise, we always have a thought
- Our memories and past experiences influence our thoughts
- When we have similar emotional reactions to certain behaviours, like crying or anger, those behaviours may be triggers for our thoughts
- When we identify which thoughts trigger our emotional reactions, we can change them and choose a more helpful response

When we understand that not everyone's afraid of clowns, we can step back and question what triggered our reaction. Emotional intelligence includes the ability to separate our automatic emotional reactions from our actions.

Let's start with the first activity in your handout. Be honest with yourself as you complete this as you will not be forced to share any of it. As you read through the list of potential emotional triggers in your handout, identify those that are likely to cause a reaction for you. Although circumstances and how well you're feeling may intensify your reaction, usually just reading about one of your triggers will cause you to feel emotion. Please complete exercise one now.

[**Give participants time to complete exercise one.**]

If you had several that were triggers, don't worry. The following exercises should help you to better manage them.

Let's go on to exercise 2, where you're looking at those emotions that were not triggers for you. These are negative emotions that are easier for you to deal with. In this exercise, you're identifying why these are easy for you by understanding how you approach or think about these behaviours. Please complete exercise 2 now.

[**Give participants time to complete exercise 2.**]

Who would like to share a thought process when dealing with a negative emotion?

[**If you are having few volunteers, you can simply read the examples on the worksheet and then continue with the following.**]

What we understand is that it's not the behaviour that triggers the reaction in us. Rather, it's how we think about the behaviour or what memories it brings up for us that causes our emotional reaction. When we understand this, we can intentionally choose a different response by changing our thought process about those behaviours that are triggering our emotional reaction. In exercise 3, you're going to list those behaviours that trigger you, what your current thought process is around that behaviour and then an alternative thought that you can choose immediately after being triggered to better manage your response. Please complete exercise 3 now.

[**Give participants time to complete exercise 3.**]

The intention with this activity was to realize that we all have emotional triggers. They are based less on the behaviours of others than they are on our thoughts about those behaviours. We have the power to manage those thoughts in order to better manage how we respond to them. This is a significant part of emotional intelligence and can be invaluable in both our personal and professional lives. We will continue to get triggered but we can begin to work on recognizing that we've been triggered and instead of just reacting, we can choose a different thought and how we'll respond.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Emotional triggers

1. If your reaction to a behaviour is usually emotionally intense, that behaviour may be a trigger for you. From the list below, think about which of these behaviours are likely to trigger a reaction in you that could include anger, frustration, pity or discomfort?

- Passive-aggression
- Whining
- Crying
- Blaming
- Criticizing or judging
- Frustration or irritation
- Worry or nervousness
- Anger
- Victim mentality
- Entitlement
- Aggression or hostility
- Always needing to please
- Silent treatment
- Being ignored or not listened to
- Manipulation
- Deceit or lying
- Sadness or moping
- Unhappiness or misery
- Sarcasm
- High-strung or intense
- Arrogance
- Conceit
- Other:

2. Referring to the list above, record the emotional states that are easy for you to deal with and how you are able to do so.

Negative emotions I can deal with easily	My thought process when dealing with this negative emotion
e.g., Whining	e.g., This person is feeling that I'm not paying attention. I usually say "I can hear it in your voice that this is upsetting to you, lets sit down and talk."
e.g., Deceit or lying	e.g., There's a reason this person doesn't feel safe telling me the truth. It's not about respect for me, its about fear for them.

3. Like the last exercise, describe the thoughts you have when faced with those negative emotions that are a trigger for you. Take the negative emotions that you described in exercise one and record your thought process when dealing with these negative emotions.

Negative emotions that are triggers	My thought process when dealing with this negative emotion	An alternative thought that would reduce the likelihood of being triggered
e.g., Whining	e.g., This person's acting like a baby and its really frustrating.	e.g., This person is feeling that I'm not paying attention. I usually say "I can hear it in your voice that this is upsetting to you, let's sit down and talk."
e.g., Deceit or lying	e.g., This person's disrespecting me and thinks I'm a fool.	e.g., There's a reason this person doesn't feel safe telling me the truth. It's not about respect for me, it's about fear for them.

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Anger as a symptom

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team activity examines situations where anger is a symptom of an underlying emotion like guilt or shame.

Suggested wording

Anger is a normal, healthy and useful emotion. Anger can motivate us to take effective action to address an injustice. Anger is only problematic when we allow it to dictate our behaviours rather than using its wisdom to choose our own behaviours. Those behaviours exist on a continuum and vary in severity. The intensity of behaviour can range from motivation or inspiration to fury or rage.

Sometimes, when we aren't under any type of actual or perceived threat, anger doesn't serve a useful function. In these situations, anger is often a secondary emotion.

This means anger may be a symptom of an underlying primary emotion, like fear or hurt, that may be more difficult to deal with or express.

We may feel that an expression of anger shows strength, whereas expressions of fear or anxiety, insecurity or hurt are a sign of weakness. This, of course, is not true, but may be a result of our upbringing or experiences. Part of emotional intelligence is the ability to express all emotions effectively. Knowing the underlying emotion means that we're more likely to be able to deal with the issue that caused it more effectively.

Think about a situation in which you or someone else reacted with anger. Record in no more than 2 sentences what you or the other person was angry about. You will not be asked to share this.

[**Give participants time to record their answer and then continue.**]

I'm now going to read through some examples of where anger was actually secondary to other emotions. As I go through this, I want you to think about whether the example you recorded could possibly have involved any of these other emotions.

The first example is where anger was secondary to the emotion of fear or insecurity.

You tease someone about slacking off at work and they respond with unusual anger. They might be fearful of losing their job because they've already been disciplined for performance. They may interpret your teasing as a threat or attack, even though you didn't intend it that way. For some people, it's easier to react with anger than to admit to insecurity or fear.

When you know this, you can look beyond the reaction to become curious about what the individual may be dealing with. You'll be less likely to take their anger personally and better able to communicate with people who are dealing with fear, insecurity or anxiety.

The next example is where anger was secondary to feeling overwhelmed or out of control.

You may be surprised to find yourself reacting angrily when invited to a special event. Upon further reflection, you might realize you're angry because you feel overcommitted. Your anger is telling you

to reconsider your work-life balance, at least temporarily. Adding just one more event may initially feel like an injustice, but you may recognize the injustice comes from the unreasonable demands you place on yourself.

This will allow your response to the invitation to be much more gracious than it might otherwise have been. It'll also allow you to take the wisdom of this emotion to make healthy changes to your work-life balance.

The next example is where anger was secondary to feeling to sadness or hurt.

Sometimes, people feel angry when they've experienced a great loss. You might feel this after a relationship breakup or the death of a loved one.

It's important to let go of your anger, whether at yourself or others, and acknowledge your sadness. The danger of hanging onto anger is that it prevents you from taking positive steps to move forward in life.

The next example is where anger was secondary to guilt or shame.

Someone casually asks you where you've been, and you react with anger. You tell them they're always checking up on you and invading your privacy. It could be that you were somewhere you know they would've wanted to go as well or with someone you know they would not approve of. Your sense of guilt or shame may make you defensive and angry.

When you can question your own angry responses, you have a chance to be objective rather than emotional. Guilt and shame, even when hidden under anger, have significant negative effects on your own mental and physical health.

Going back to your example, are you able to see how other emotions can be masked by visible or audible displays of anger?

The next time you or someone else reacts with anger, take a moment to consider if there are underlying emotions at play. This simple reflection can change the way you respond and lead to a more effective outcome.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, Mary Ann Baynton

Express anger constructively

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team activity explores how expressing anger constructively may be the best way to minimize problematic circumstances in the future.

Preparation

In advance of the meeting, send each participant the worksheet on the following page. You can also download it from **clwsmh.com/resources/express-anger-constructively-ws**.

Have these 3 questions available on a screen or flip chart.

Expressing anger constructively – ask yourself:

1. What do I believe is unfair or unjust?
2. What assumptions am I making?
3. How can I express my fears or concerns without accusing or making judgments about others

Suggested wording

It's inevitable that sometimes you'll feel anger. What's not inevitable is how you manage and express your anger.

It's not reasonable to ask anyone, including yourself, to not have certain emotional reactions. To ignore anger is to ignore its basic function of sending you a message about something you feel is unfair or unjust.

It's not about never feeling angry, but instead learning ways to express your anger constructively to minimize the negative impacts angry behaviour can have on you or others.

It's important to consider how you can express your anger constructively.

We'll now read through your handout, the five steps to expressing your anger constructively. I invite you to express any concerns or questions about each of the steps as we go through them.

1. Before saying or doing anything, take a moment to contemplate whether you are justifiably angry, or whether your angry reaction resulted from an impulse due to a misperception or an unrelated personal trigger. Ask yourself what do I believe is unfair or unjust about this situation? The more specific you can be about the facts, the more objective you can be about how you'd like to resolve or address the situation.
2. Remain respectful at all times. (Do not make judgments or accusations. Avoid raising your voice, name-calling or swearing.)
3. Ensure that the anger stays proportionate to the situation (don't overreact). Ask yourself, what assumptions am I making about this situation? These are judgments about people's motives, thoughts or intentions that you couldn't possibly prove.

4. Avoid personalizing the situation (e.g., say “the fact that your project is late is causing real difficulties for the team” rather than “I’m so tired of you not caring about deadlines”).
5. Remember that the goal of expressing anger constructively is to address its cause and work toward problem- solving, not to punish those involved in causing it. Ask yourself how can I express my fears or concerns without accusing or making judgments about others? Ensure that you take responsibility for your emotions and assumptions. For example, say “I’m frustrated about having to wait here because I’m anxious about the amount of work I have left,” rather than, “I can’t believe how rude you were to make me wait.”

Remember, the goal of expressing anger constructively is to identify its cause, take ownership of your own emotions and objectively work towards addressing it. The goal isn’t to punish others or make them suffer.

[**Display the 3 questions you prepared on a screen or flipchart.**]

Record the 3 questions above someplace you can access easily the next time you’re angry. Before you express your anger, ask yourself the questions. Even if your response isn’t perfect, you’ll be expressing your anger more constructively.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Express anger constructively

The five steps to expressing your anger constructively

1. Before saying or doing anything, take a moment to contemplate whether you are justifiably angry, or whether your angry reaction resulted from an impulse due to a misperception or an unrelated personal trigger. Ask yourself what do I believe is unfair or unjust about this situation? The more specific you can be about the facts, the more objective you can be about how you'd like to resolve or address the situation.
2. Remain respectful at all times. (Do not make judgments or accusations. Avoid raising your voice, name-calling or swearing.)
3. Ensure that the anger stays proportionate to the situation (don't overreact). Ask yourself what assumptions am I making about this situation? These are judgments about people's motives, thoughts or intentions that you couldn't possibly prove.
4. Avoid personalizing the situation (e.g., say "the fact that your project is late is causing real difficulties for the team" rather than "I'm so tired of you not caring about deadlines").
5. Remember that the goal of expressing anger constructively is to address its cause and work toward problem- solving, not to punish those involved in causing it. Ask yourself how can I express my fears or concerns without accusing or making judgments about others? Ensure that you take responsibility for your emotions and assumptions. For example, say "I'm frustrated about having to wait here because I'm anxious about the amount of work I have left," rather than, "I can't believe how rude you were to make me wait."

Remember, the goal of expressing anger constructively is to identify its cause, take ownership of your own emotions and objectively work towards addressing it. The goal isn't to punish others or make them suffer.

Cheat sheet

3 questions to ask yourself when angry

1

2

3

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Deal with worry

About 30 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This team-building activity helps build effective problem-solving skills to reduce the stress that worrying can cause.

Preparation

Hand out or email a list of the following questions to participants in advance of the meeting.

1. What's one thing you worry about related to your work?
2. What's the worst thing that could happen?
3. How likely is it that this terrible thing will, in fact, occur?
4. If it did happen, what would you do, and/or who would you turn to?
5. What other challenging situations have you handled that indicate you would probably be able to handle whatever may come along?

Complete your own before you begin the session, as you'll be demonstrating how to more effectively deal with worry at work.

Pay special attention to what your team members share in terms of what their worries are at work. You may want to jot them down so that later you can help problem-solve any unresolved worries.

Suggested wording

If you haven't already done so, please answer the questions on your handout. Everyone will be asked to share their answer to question #1 and I'll ask for volunteers to share answers to the other questions. The point of this exercise is to improve our problem-solving skills. I'll begin with my worry and it is ...

[Once you've shared your answer, ask everyone to share their answer to question #1. After everyone has shared you can share the rest of your answers to questions 2 to 5 and ask for volunteers to share theirs.]

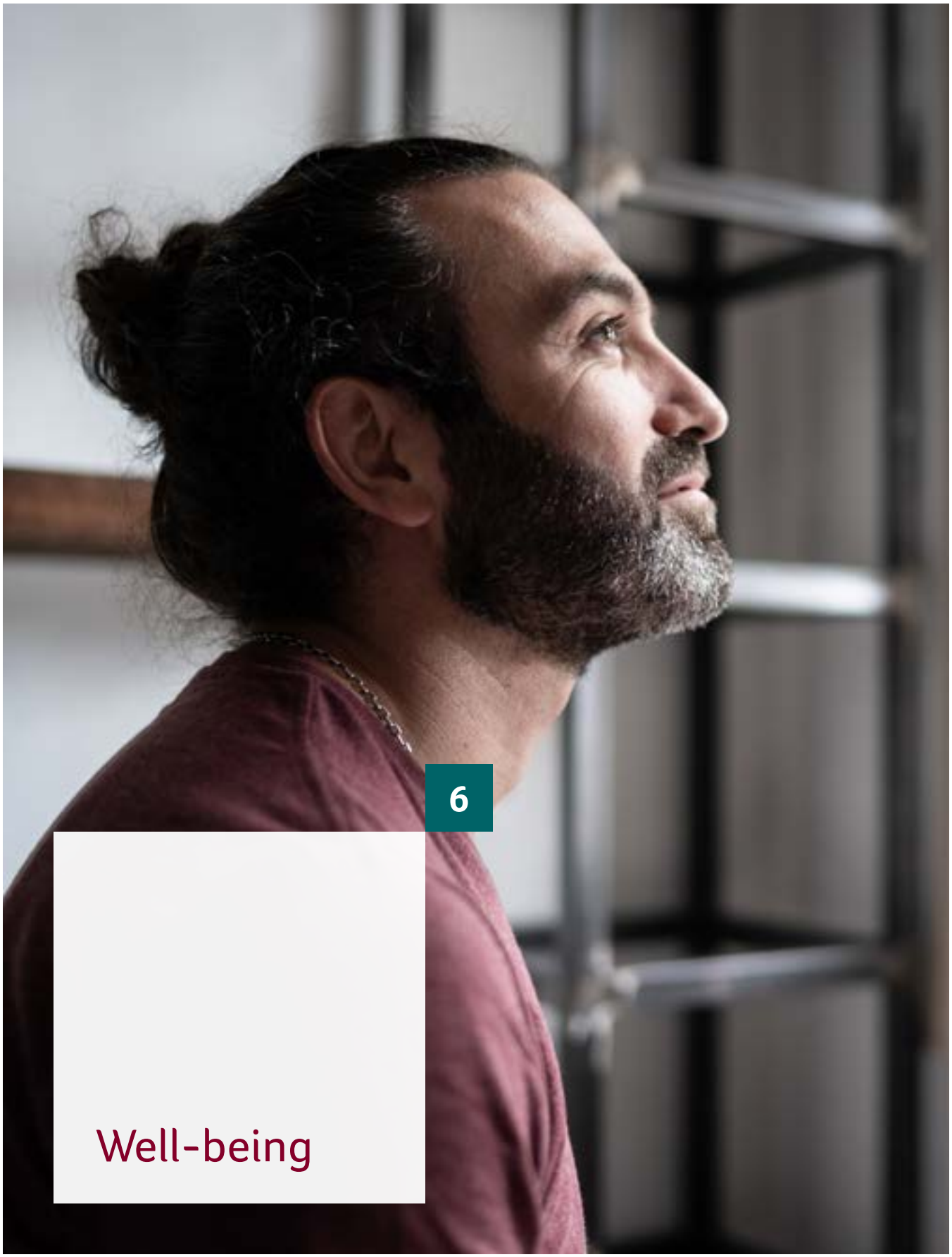
1. What's one thing you worry about related to your work?
2. What's the worst thing that could happen?
3. How likely is it that this terrible thing will, in fact, occur?
4. If it did happen, what would you do, and/or who would you turn to?
5. What other challenging situations have you handled that indicate you would probably be able to handle whatever may come along?

Thank you for sharing your examples. While worry is common, it can also be a waste of our energy. If there's something that needs to change or be dealt with, we should do this as a team. If it can't be changed or dealt with, we should develop a way to accept that.

When we discuss what we're worried about, often we can find solutions to help reduce our stress.

To wrap up, let's take a moment to individually consider one constructive thing you'd do differently when worried about work in the future.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra



6

Well-being



We acknowledge that not every work team is ready to venture into the area of mindfulness, but research has provided evidence that this practice can improve well-being, stress management and ultimately productivity at work.

The activities in this section are for those who want to explore mindfulness from a practical perspective:

ABCDs of de-stressing

Calm the mind to improve focus and reduce stress.

Get mellow

An activity to calm the mind by relaxing the body.

Journal gratefulness

An activity to help the mind focus on what is positive to balance out the need to deal with the negative.

Get moving

An activity to help recognize the difference in tension and energy that even a couple minutes of movement can make.

Get creative

An activity to help recognize how something as simple as colouring can help relax both mind and body.

Wear a Mona Lisa smile

Understand how reducing tension in the face and body can reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

Relevant resources

Learning to recharge workshop

This workshop introduces different approaches to wellness breaks at work. These ideas can help energize, calm the mind and relax the body.

Healthy break activities

These low to no-cost break activities can help you energize, calm your mind or relax your body.

Work-life balance tips

Balancing your work and personal life can be challenging and stressful at times. These tips and strategies can help.

Managing stress

Learn how to manage your reactions to stress and protect your well-being.

Mental health apps

We've reviewed apps for Windows, IOS, and Android devices that may support good mental health.

ABCDs of de-stressing

Approximately 10-15 minutes per session

Learning objective

This activity helps team members develop skills for calming the mind, improving focus and reducing stress. Disconnecting from the virtual world and distractions, can help reduce technology-related stress even when done online. This can be done at the beginning or end of a meeting.

Instructions

Ideally, the leader would try this activity a few times on their own before rolling it out to their team.

When performing this activity virtually ensure the team is aware ahead of the session that the following should be done to prepare themselves:

- Remove distractions from your immediate area or consider using earphones so you only hear the online instructions
  - → Computer notifications should be turned off during the session to reduce distractions
  - → Any devices nearby should be on silent or can be moved altogether if they're still too distracting
  - → Microphones should be muted for this activity. Cameras can also be off for anyone who prefers that.

Suggested wording

Most work situations require focus and energy. Slowing down may feel counterproductive. Yet research shows that taking time to slow down, even for just a few minutes, can improve productivity and focus.

As challenging or uncomfortable as it may feel for some of you, please give this a try. Notice the stress that is in your body right now. Is it in your neck, around your eyes, in your shoulders? Pay attention and notice the changes after we complete this exercise. I'll be talking in my best calm, slow voice and you just need to close your eyes and follow my instructions, which are conveniently labeled A, B, C, and D. Try to keep your body and mind still throughout this exercise.

1. A is for "Anatomy". We don't want the physical body getting in the way of the mind. Sit comfortably in your chair, feet on the ground, hands placed on your legs or in your lap. Don't lean too far back – you may get sleepy, and this is about calming an alert mind.
2. B is for "Breathing". Just breathe in (demonstrate breathing in slowly) and out (demonstrate breathing out slowly). The skill here is to train your mental focus on your breath rather than on your thoughts. Breathe in and out normally; don't hold your breath or exaggerate it. Just pay attention to it.

3. C is for “Counting”. Breathe gently while you silently count in and out. “1” breathe in, “2” breathe out, “3” breathe in, and “4” breathe out. (While whispering lead the group slowly through a count of 10, then ask them to continue for another minute or so on their own. Give the next instruction in a soft voice, after 20 seconds or so, making sure your microphone is not too close to your mouth creating a peaceful tone.)
4. D is for “Distraction”. You will get distracted by sounds, smells and thoughts. Each time you notice you’re being distracted, gently bring your attention back to your breathing and start again at one. Continue to focus on your breathing and I will let you know when to stop.

Instructions

Allow the group to continue in silence for a few minutes. Wrap up in a soft voice.

Suggested wording

When you are ready, open your eyes, look around, and maybe take a stretch.

Pay attention to the places where you felt stress when we started. Is it the same or better?

Do you feel more or less focused?

We did this for fewer than five minutes, yet most of us will have gained a sense of calmer focus.

As you go about your day, see if you can maintain a calmer, more productive focus.

Instructions

You can also follow up by suggesting people try this the next time they’re feeling stressed or anticipate they’ll be going into a stressful situation.

If they’re interested in why this works, you could recommend they listen to the Ted Talk by Andy Puddicombe, “All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes”, which can be found online **here**.

Activity developed with help from: Adriana Ricketts

Get mellow

15 minutes

Learning objective

An activity to calm the mind by relaxing the body.

Preparation

You may wish to have calming background music when you begin this activity.

Suggested wording

It's always important to take your break at work. Removing yourself physically and mentally from your work is proven to improve your focus and productivity. Even a 5-minute break can help when it may be difficult to step away from your work due to any reason like a tight deadline.

Record how you are feeling right now. Do you have any points of tension in your body? What are you thinking about? What might be distracting you? You have one minute.

[**After one minute.**]

The activity we are going to do now is one way to calm the body and mind.

I would like everyone to sit and plant both feet firmly on the ground.

Place your hands on your legs with your palms up. If you are comfortable to do so, gently close your eyes.

Now just relax and breathe normally.

[Pause for 5 seconds between each of the following steps.]

Relax all of the muscles in your face

Now focus your attention on the backs of your eyelids

Relax the back of your head. Relax your neck and shoulders

Relax your arms. Now focus on the feeling of your hands on your lap

Relax your chest

Relax your back

Relax your hips and belly

Relax your thighs

Relax your calves. Relax your feet

Focus on the feeling and sensations of the bottom of your feet

Now I'd like you to switch your focus to the most obvious sound in the room

Now I'd like you to release your focus completely

Now gently open your eyes

[**Pause for another 5 seconds.**]

Record how you are feeling now and compare it to what you wrote before this activity began. You have one minute.

[**After one minute.**]

[**If it is live, take up answers; if it is virtual describe how they can respond. After 3 minutes, move on.**]

That was less than 2 minutes of calming our mind and body. Imagine what you could do in 5 minutes or more. The intention is to take a break from your thought process, which is exhausting for many people. Focusing on your other senses, such as hearing and touch, can be calming and is a great way to recharge.

Simply focus on relaxing each part of your body while you sit and breathe deeply. You can use this technique to relax at any time throughout your day.

Activity developed with help from: Bailey Vaez, Katie Cino, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Journal gratefulness

15 minutes

Learning objective

An activity to help the mind focus on what is positive to balance out the need to deal with the negative.

Preparation

This activity requires a way for each participant to record their answers.

Suggested wording

Our brains can be trained to focus on anything. For example, you may rarely notice a Jeep vehicle on the road. However, once a friend of yours gets a Jeep, you may suddenly notice them everywhere. The reason for this is that your brain is now looking for that kind of vehicle.

There is a saying: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

We can train our brains to look for problems everywhere. We are often trained in critical thinking, which encourages us to find flaws in every situation. However, sometimes when we think critically about every positive experience, we can take away some of our enjoyment of it. We can also look at everyone through a critical and judgmental perspective, therefore making relationships less enjoyable.

We don't want to lose our ability for critical thinking, but we want to balance it out by also optimizing our ability to see the positives in situations and people. One way to see the positives is to purposefully look for things that we can be grateful for. These things can be characteristics, situations and experiences that we have on a day-to-day basis. Just like the Jeep, we can begin to see the positives that were always there but may have been overlooked in the past.

Writing down the positives helps us retrain our brains to recognize what is good in our lives and what we can be grateful for. This can help change the quality of our lives.

You can do this activity on paper, in an actual journal or online. You can do this to take some time for yourself either at work or at home. Sometimes when we are especially stressed, taking a few minutes to remember the good things in our lives can help put our current stressor in perspective.

You don't need full sentences. Point form notes are also okay. You might give yourself a certain number of gratefulness points to write down, or you can set a timer on your phone. Take some deep, calming breaths as you begin to think reflect on your day and life.

Right now, I would like you to do this activity thinking as broadly as possible. When we're having a bad day or struggling, it may seem like there's nothing good or positive in life. If this is the case, you might be grateful for something like no traffic on your way to work, a parking spot close to the grocery store yesterday in the rain, or that you got to work on time.

Gratitude comes in all shapes and sizes. You have 5 minutes to write as many things as you can; don't stop writing until I tell you that the time is up.

[After 5 minutes.]

I'd like to ask everyone to now share one or more things that they are grateful for.

[Take up as many answers as you can in one minute either virtually or in person.]

In the workplace, one way you can use your break time for a similar activity is to write down what you're grateful for in terms of your job, the people you work with or the accomplishments you've made that day.

You can choose whether you share this or not, but the positive impact on your mind will happen in either case. Some workplaces even put a gratitude board up where people can post what they are grateful for that day.

When you post how grateful you are for help or advice from co-workers, the positive effects can expand to everyone.

Activity developed with help from: Tracy Clarke, David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Get moving

15 minutes

Learning objective

An activity to help recognize the difference in tension and energy that even a couple minutes of movement can make.

Preparation

This activity requires a way for each participant to record their answers.

Suggested wording

Before we begin, I want you to record how you are feeling right now. Describe where there is tension in your body and describe your energy levels. I'll give you one minute.

[**After one minute.**]

This break activity is really easy to do. Essentially, it's just to get up and move away from wherever you are working. You could fill your water bottle or get a snack. You could go for a walk or some other form of exercise. The only thing you can't do during this break is check your devices. The reason for this is that you're still engaging your mind rather than taking a break and moving your body. Whatever it is, make sure you're moving away from your work.

For today, I'll walk us through a series of stretch movements that you can do seated or standing. Remember that none of these movements should cause pain, and if they do you should stop.

Please stand up if you are able to and move away from where you were sitting.

We are going to start with walking and marching in place. When I say "recharge" lift your knees up high and pump your arms. If you're unable to stand, simulate it from your seated position. When I say "walk" relax your arms and move at a comfortable pace.

Ready? Walk.

[**In total this should be 1 – 2 minutes of marching and walking. You can alternate back and forth starting and ending with walking as you see fit.**]

[**For each of the following, allow about 10 seconds per side for each instruction.**]

Raise both arms over your head and gently pull on the elbow of one arm with the other.

Now switch arms and gently pull on the elbow of the other arm.

Drop your chin to your chest and roll your neck gently to one side, keeping your chin tucked.

Now, roll your neck gently to the other side.

Repeat this 5 times.

Roll your shoulders backwards in circles.

Now roll your shoulders forwards in circles.

Extend your arm directly in front of you and gently pull your fingertips back to extend your wrist. Repeat on the other side.

Extend your arm directly in front of you with your fingertips facing down and pull your knuckles towards your arm.

This exercise is especially helpful for those who spend a lot of time using a keyboard.

If you're standing, sit back down in your seat.

If you're able, cross one of your legs placing your ankle over the other knee and lean forward gently.

Next repeat with the other ankle over your other knee.

Remember to lean forward gently. Still seated, twist at the waist while keeping your hips facing forward. Gently twist a little bit more on the same side.

Repeat on the other side.

Our final exercise is simply to extend your arms in front of you and shake your arms, wrists and elbows.

I want you to record how you are feeling now. Describe any changes in the tension and energy levels you noticed before we began. I'll give you one minute to record this.

[**After one minute.**]

Did anyone notice a difference?

[**Take up answers for 2 minutes.**]

Although we have only spent a couple of minutes moving, our bodies are more energized than they would have been if we just continued to sit. This energy also translates into improved focus and productivity. If you were to spend 15 minutes moving the benefits would be even greater.

Those extra steps you take can help contribute to better health by making you more active and giving you an energizing break throughout the day.

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Notes

Get creative

15 minutes

Learning objective

An activity to help recognize how something as simple as colouring can help relax both mind and body.

Preparation

For this activity each participant should have a printed copy of the colouring sheets found at clwsmh.com/resources/colouring-pages. If you are doing this virtually, you can add this link in the chat function. You will need enough crayons, markers, or pencil crayons for each table or if working virtually, let participants know beforehand to have these tools ready.

Suggested wording

This activity is another way to slow down your thought process and also relax both mind and body. It's a way to invite free flowing creativity rather than critical thinking skills.

When you were younger, you may have gotten into trouble for doodling in school. However, recent research shows that doodling can actually help you focus your attention even while you are listening. For some people, doodling allows for more creative thinking and more innovation.

In this activity, you're actually being encouraged to doodle. It doesn't matter if you have great art skills or not, colouring can be both soothing and invigorating.

I would like you to take the time now to just have some fun. If you prefer to draw, choose a blank piece of paper and go for it. My only request is that you don't stop colouring or drawing until time is up. You have 5 minutes.

[**After 5 minutes.**]

What I would like you to think about now, is where your mind was while you were colouring or drawing. Did you have racing thoughts? Were you able to work out challenges or ideas?

[**Take up some answers for 2 minutes.**]

Like all of the break activities, some will be really effective for you and some will not be. Your goal is to identify a variety of ideas that work for you and choose those that are most relevant to you in the moment.

Activity developed with help from: David MacDonald, Mary Ann Baynton

Wear a Mona Lisa smile

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size

Learning objective

This group activity reminds team members that reducing tension in the face and body can reduce the intensity of negative emotions and help lift your mood.

Preparation

This activity requires a way for each participant to record their answers.

Suggested wording

Research has shown that the simple act of positioning your face into a natural half smile like you can see in the painting of Mona Lisa, can lift your mood. It sounds too simple to be true, but it works! This is not the same as someone telling us to smile which can make us more angry or frustrated. This is you choosing your demeanor.

Think about a recent situation that made you angry. Close your eyes, clench your fists, lean forward and squish your face into a "mad" expression. Hold this posture for about a minute while thinking about the situation and your anger in detail. Try to remember what was said or done, how you felt and why the situation made you angry. Keep your eyes closed and continue to think about the situation.

[**After 30 seconds.**]

Now I want you to write down your answer to this question:

What is the intensity of your anger one a scale of 0 – 100 at this moment?

[**After they've had a chance to write down their answer.**]

Now, if you haven't already done so, unclench your fists and sit back in a relaxed fashion. Relax all of the muscles in your face and put on a gentle half smile. The muscles around your eyes and mouth should feel relaxed, and the corners of your mouth should be slightly upturned. Think again about the same situation for approximately one minute, while holding this posture.

[**After 60 seconds.**]

Again, I'd like you to write down your answer to this question:

What is the intensity of your anger one a scale of 0 – 100 at this moment?

[**After they've had a chance to write down their answer.**]

Notice if there was even a slight reduction in the intensity of your emotion.

Although it can take some practice, over time you may find the simple act of placing your face into a half smile can reduce the intensity of negative emotions you're experiencing. This allows you to more intentionally choose your reactions and responses.

Activity developed with help from: Dr. Joti Samra, Mary Ann Baynton



Conclusion

One component of resilience is the ability to adapt to change. Team dynamics change. Team members and leaders change. Your organization itself will change. Being prepared with strategies, approaches and tools to improve the ability to anticipate and adapt to these inevitable changes will go a long way to promoting higher levels of effectiveness, well-being and mental health in the workplace.

Building stronger teams is a key strategy for helping us respond more effectively to stressors in both work and life.

Additional activities are available at: **clwsmh.com**

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