DON’T PASS IT ON: BAD MOODS AT WORK

> Just try watching that popular YouTube sensation of “Jill and Kevin’s Wedding Entrance” and not smiling as the bridal party dances down the aisle, sporting sunglasses and a happiness that’s palpable through the monitor. It’s almost impossible not to be influenced by the joyful emotions we see. Brain scientists have proven what we have sensed intuitively: emotions are contagious.

While both positive and negative emotions are infectious, negative ones spread faster.

Nowhere is this more detrimental than at work. We all know how one malcontent person can dampen the spirit of everyone.

While total immunity against emotional contagion may be just for monks in Tibet, the rest of us can short-circuit its potentially disruptive effect.

1 Manage that mood. You are a walking mood inductor and your subordinates are “receptors.” Your mood impacts how they feel, and, consequently, how they perform.

2 Make meetings attitude-free. Meetings can be cauldrons of emotion — the mood can determine what does or doesn’t get discussed, how it is discussed, and consequently, what is accomplished. If you are a leader, you control the dimmer switch of performance. People are continuously watching you to gauge if it’s a bright, dim or dark setting.

Self-awareness precedes self-management. Stop yourself and ask: Am I being excessively negative or judgmental? Am I impatient? Is my tone dismissive?

If it is particularly difficult to snap out of a bad mood, just be upfront: “I am not in a good mood right now; can we meet this afternoon?” Most people will appreciate your raw honesty. Going into self-imposed quarantine for an hour is not only a graceful thing to do, but also an emotionally intelligent choice.

3 Create a Stop-Doing List. In his book “Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t,” Jim Collins tells how companies making that leap displayed a remarkable discipline “to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk.”

For example, if you constantly complain about how busy you are, start delegating. Collins’ Stop-Doing list included getting rid of layers and re-organizing his company from top-down management to a hub and spoke model. He stopped “unnecessary fire drills,” responding too dramatically to e-mails and setting off a staff-wide emotional firestorm. Now he answers messages off-line, hits save and re-reads before sending.

4 Eliminate energy drainers. Do these sound familiar: internalizing others’ criticism, fragmented boundaries, power struggles, useless networking and continuous one-way favors?

What can you eliminate to make room for what energizes you and keeps you focused on what matters?

5 Focus on what you do best. We are prone to stress and perpetual bad moods when we are fragmented in our approach. In “Profit from the Core: A Return to Growth in Turbulent Times,” the authors advise refocusing on what you do best. Doing so allows you to more easily spot inefficiencies draining your business. The same applies to our personal life: If we don’t narrow our activities to a fundamental core, setting meaningful goals becomes much harder.

6 Be skeptical of self-evaluations when you are not in a good mood. We lose our objectivity when we view things through the dark prism of a bad mood.

7 Honor the mood-creativity connection. University of Toronto research proves that a good mood enhances our ability to think laterally. Consider this before your next brainstorming session. If you’re feeling a little cranky or unenthused, try listening, talking a short walk or to upbeat music or reflecting on things you appreciate in your life.

8 Monitor moods of front-line staff. Studies have shown that emotional contagion between customers and employees influence the customer’s attitude towards product and intention to repurchase. If you want happy customers, you need employees to have and display genuine positive emotions. So make sure you praise not just the deeds but also the attitude of upbeat, cheerful employees. And be sure to check in with those who are having a bad day and consider reassigning them to a less interactive role, if possible.

9 Think before you send. This oft-heard advice bears repeating. Bad moods can be transmitted as loud and clear electronically as they are face to face. Just as we can’t un-ring a bell, we cannot retrieve a hastily sent e-mail that will be a permanent, digital reminder of your bad mood.

10 Don’t let others contaminate you. Someone once said: “Moods should be heard but never danced to.” It takes self-determination and strength of will to maintain your emotional freedom no matter what is going on around you.

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