

Strong Feelings Cut off Your Head, Thinking and Advice Receiving

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Ruth arrived at work, again, in a foul mood. Her nasty divorce battle was taking a toll. She had been told that if she had any more conflict with her co-workers she was risking her credibility and job. She didn't pay heed. Ruth was asked into her boss's office for a serious talk.

Maurice Schweitzer, a Wharton professor and Francesca Gino of Carnegie Mellon University wrote about the effects of strong emotions in a paper titled "Blinded by Anger or Feeling the Love: How Emotions Influence Advice Taking." Here is their finding:

". . . people who feel incidental gratitude are more trusting and more receptive to advice than are people in a neutral emotional state, and that people in a neutral state are more trusting and more receptive to advice than are people who feel incidental anger." What do they mean by *incidental*? *Incidental* emotions are feelings triggered by a past incident that is *irrelevant* to the present. "Advice" ranges from recommendations to consultation to simple communication.

Ruth's divorce battle has little to do with her work but everything to do with her functioning. A dear friend and colleague of mine who is the executive director of an agency has a husband at home challenged with cancer. She's sensibly watching her emotions, surrounding herself with wise counsel; attending support sessions just for herself and has a back up plan for a leave of absence. She's aware that emotions could distort her logic and decision making.

These emotional intelligence precautions protect her, her employees and colleagues from emotional bias. Here's how you can protect yourself when feeling strong emotions and strengthen your workplace resilience:

1. Periodically take note of your emotional state.
2. Ask yourself, "Is this feeling about this situation or something else?" "At whom am I really feeling angry, disappointed, frustrated, jealous or afraid?"
3. Find a safe place or person to talk about your strong feelings.
4. Learn strategies such as deep breathing, supportive self talk or exercise to calm your emotional state.

5. Apologize if you made an irrational decision or said something inappropriate.
6. When in contact with those who are in a high feeling state avoid *logical* conversations or advice giving. Be alert to people's personal and work stressors. Are they triggered by a marital fight, a car accident, tension with another co-worker or the death of a loved one? If so, listen more than talk.
7. Genuinely support others. You will find they will more easily trust you and accept your guidance and advice.

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