

The CEO Advantage: Master Your Emotions to Build Trust and Candour

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

Are you a stoplight CEO? A client's assistant had a little stoplight hidden on the side of her desk. She explained to me that when it's green her boss is in a good mood and you're probably going to get what you want. When it's yellow it means you're going in at your own risk. And when it's red, you should probably reschedule the meeting. Wow.

CEO mistake

This CEO was poisoning his work environment with his lack of emotional intelligence. I first met him when the dismal economy hit. He heads a publicly traded company in a tough industry and was under a lot of stress. At our first coaching session (a yellow day, according to his assistant), he exclaimed that he was having a horrible morning. "Our infrastructure costs are too high; we lost our biggest customer last month; I'm going to have to fire one of my VPs; my travel schedule is nuts ..."

I cut him off right there.

"Stop. You just can't show up at work like this." His negative emotional state was preventing his reports from bringing key issues and challenges to his attention, because he was clearly having a hard time just dealing with the issues at hand.

"Just because I'm the CEO, I have to be happy and optimistic every day?" he lamented. Actually, yes.

CEO solution

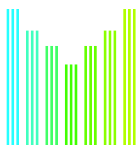
Emotions determine the quality of our lives and are contagious. If you're in a leadership role, you signed up to motivate and inspire people to deliver extraordinary results. Your ability to do so is enhanced if you can master your emotions. Start by focusing on five key areas: mood, adaptability, stress management, interpersonal relationships and self-awareness.

In this case, I gave our CEO a one-week challenge. "Every day this week, show up at the office in a positive emotional state: happy, optimistic, determined, passionate and confident."

At the end of the week, he reported back.

"People have been thanking me for being such a positive, easy person to work with. They say I am listening and focused on helping. And I've had the best week in my job for a long time."

He was also mortified to find out about the stoplight. "It's been green all week so my assistant got rid of it."



Don't be a stoplight CEO. Here are seven strategies for developing a positive emotional mindset:

- choose positive emotions every day (happiness, optimism, determination, confidence, gratitude, curiosity, passion);
- embrace negative emotions (anger, frustration, disappointment, fear, hurt, sadness, guilt, loneliness, inadequacy) as a signal to take action;
- own your emotions; don't play the blame game in your external environment;
- change your physical state (move your body) to get out of a negative emotional state;
- practise every day to develop a new success habit; and
- develop your top 10 list of what makes you feel good. •

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