

The emotionally-balanced boss

Here's how to manage your emotions intelligently rather than letting them control you...

- You get frustrated with employees who make the same mistakes over and over again.
- You feel pressurised and stressed by clients whose demands are unreasonable.
- Your stomach goes into a knot with anticipation of big orders that may – or may not – come through.
- You worry that a strike at your key supplier could disrupt your production process.
- You snap at a colleague and then feel guilty believing that your behaviour was unreasonable.

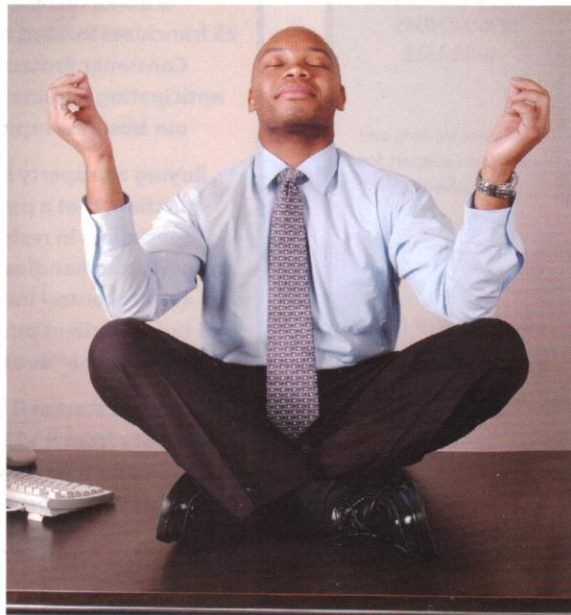
There's a lot more emotion in the workplace than you may think. But we've been taught that big boys don't cry and that maintaining a stiff upper lip, no matter the circumstances, is the professional approach. So we put a lot of effort and energy into hiding our emotions.

You can run but you can't hide

It's not always easy. Your emotional state is carried in your body language and the non-verbal signals you send out. When you're angry, frustrated or upset, you can feel the tension in your stomach and shoulders. You may notice that the rate of your breathing increases. Others see the frown on your face and clenched jaw muscles; they hear your harsh voice.

As the tension and stress build up, you get to a point where you can no longer control your emotions and eventually you explode with anger, harsh words, and even physical violence. This is the worst possible way to communicate how you feel. Your emotions, not your intellectual faculties, are in charge and in the heat of the moment when you are so angry you can't think straight, you may well say and do things you regret later.

You can try to keep your feelings entirely out of the picture, but this seldom works. We



all feel strongly about many issues, and frustration, anger, disappointment and excitement are all powerful emotions that are hard to hide. We may think we can, but our body language usually gives us away.

How often have you felt strongly about something and had someone say to you: "Are you okay?" Your conventional response is likely to be: "Yes, I'm fine." But the person may continue to probe: "Are you sure? You seem..."

This interchange demonstrates how your non-verbal signals let others know that something is bothering you, but leaves them mystified about what exactly is going on.

Use emotion positively

Most importantly, emotions put energy into your interactions with others and provide the impetus for people to listen to what you have to say and to consider changing their ways. Think of a conversation with an employee who has been performing well, but has started to make careless mistakes.

You have spoken to him a couple of times, but nothing has changed. Your next conversation could be the last one before you have to take disciplinary action.

You could open the conversation by saying: "We've reviewed your performance over the last three months." And refer to evidence of his continuing poor performance. Next you might say: "I'm going to give you one more month. Then I will have no option but to start disciplinary action."

See how much stronger the conversation would be if you added: "When you started with us I had great hopes for your future with the company. Frankly, I'm disappointed in how things are turning out." Although it may

sound low key, telling someone that you are disappointed in them is one of the strongest pieces of feedback you can give.

If you then add the open question: "What's going on?" You make it as safe as possible for the employee to give his side of the story so you can get to the bottom of the problem before you decide on the action to take.

The best option is always to manage your emotions intelligently, rather than shutting them out completely or waiting until they blow up and control you. This means becoming aware of your feelings and learning how to express them appropriately. When you do, you will find that their power helps you create better quality conversations and build better relationships. **YB**

Maureen Collins's experience is in management and leadership training; team building, and handling change and transition. She is also the author of *Straight Talk: Conversations at Work That Get Results*. For more visit: www.straight-talk.co.za.