



# Book Emotional Fitness at Work

## 6 Strategic Steps to Success Using the Power of Emotion

Barton Goldsmith  
Career Press, 2009  
[Listen now](#)

- [play](#)
- [pause](#)

00:00  
00:00

### Recommendation

What role do emotions play in the workplace, especially during hard economic times? Psychotherapist Barton Goldsmith poses this provocative, relevant question early in his book. To answer it, he provides accessible, broad advice as opposed to delving deeply into the subject. His book is a compilation of business advice in 62 short chapters sorted into six categories, with a little overlap in places, apparently for the sake of thoroughness. Although perhaps not well served by his proofreader, Goldsmith briefly and interestingly touches on many management topics, like embracing failure, encouraging innovation, having fun in the workplace, planning for crises, resolving conflicts and bestowing recognition. Although he devotes only a few pages to each issue, *BooksInShort* recommends his book as an overview of tips for success with emotionally based concerns in the business world.

### Take-Aways

- Emotions affect your job performance and can help or hinder your team’s success.
- Fear and other destructive emotions slow productivity, inhibit communication and stunt creativity.
- To improve employee performance during a crisis, foster a work environment where people can speak openly about their worries.
- To get along and get ahead at work, compromise, treat others well and be forthcoming.
- Reacting angrily or aggressively usually exacerbates a potentially volatile situation.
- Conflict resolution is an essential skill for a smooth-functioning workplace.
- Problems aren’t necessarily roadblocks. They are chances to develop and improve.
- Be prepared for a crisis. Develop a plan that accounts for several possible scenarios.
- Mentoring programs create a culture of encouragement while nurturing future leaders.
- Great managers connect emotionally with their employees. They recognize effort, make strong hiring choices and know when to delegate.

### Summary

#### Managing in the Slump

The current financial downturn has produced a torrent of alarm, anxiety and anger among U.S. workers. People are worried about the economy and their job security, and they’re bringing that emotion into the office. How do these negative feelings affect the workplace? Unhappy, emotional people may behave unpredictably or refuse to cooperate, either by withdrawing or by acting aggressively. They might miss deadlines, offend clients and co-workers, and fail to contribute. The ongoing crisis likely has made them cautious and risk adverse. Fear may slow their productivity, inhibit their communication and stunt their creativity.

“Emotions are a constant in the business universe, and to navigate successfully, you need to understand and harness their energy.”

As a manager, do not attempt to handle these problems by pushing employees to suppress their emotions. Instead, encourage them to recognize their feelings and communicate about them in an open, healthy way. Hire experienced counselors if necessary. Although some people think that business professionals should not be demonstrative, you can't be passionate about your work without being emotional. Emotions provide the energy that fuels your company's development.

## Secrets of Success

High achievers have many traits in common. They are confident in their abilities and they trust their instincts. They are lifelong students and voracious readers who pursue knowledge in diverse areas. Before offering a solution to a problem, high performers generally ask many questions. Although they are excellent multitaskers, they also know how to delegate. They surround themselves with bright, energetic, talented peers and they live their lives according to their inner moral compasses.

“Emotional and passionate people make things happen, but they are not encouraged in business settings where detached, cool and objective decision-making skills are considered to be strengths.”

Attaining success also involves defining realistic goals. Employees are less likely to reach goals created just to appease their managers or co-workers. If you lead people, get them to buy into the company's goals by appealing to their emotions. Where there is heart, there is accomplishment. Listen to what is important to your employees and give them the freedom and support to pursue their objectives.

“When people have their emotions attached to a goal, it is achieved.”

Don't punish others, or yourself, for mistakes. Instead, learn from missteps and move on. Understand that making errors is part of the process. Help foster a forgiving, tolerant work environment where people feel comfortable communicating about blunders and addressing them.

## Navigating Emotional Exchanges

Good interactions contribute to a productive work environment. To communicate clearly and foster cooperation, heed these 10 guidelines:

1. Listen as much as you talk.
2. Improve your communication skills through practice and observation.
3. Develop a professional conversational style that fits your personality and is appropriate for your workplace.
4. Recognize that nonverbal messages are as important as what people say.
5. Read the emotions behind a speaker's words.
6. Create a nonthreatening atmosphere in which your co-workers or employees feel comfortable verbalizing their feelings.
7. Be ready for communication crises. Have a plan for managing them.
8. Address issues promptly.
9. Offer only constructive criticism. Focus on the problem, not the person.
10. Ask thought-provoking, comprehensive questions.

## “We Can Work It Out”

Workplace conflicts are inevitable, so learning how to resolve them is essential. Try not to react immediately to a tense situation. If possible, think about it for a while, perhaps overnight. Processing your emotions before you initiate a difficult conversation will help you communicate in a clear, effective way. Practice what you want to say and even write it down. Distinguish between trying to address an issue and simply complaining. Seek an objective perspective from someone who is not mired in the conflict. When you speak to the co-worker involved, tailor your message to him or her. Be specific, respectful and courteous.

“Most people dislike the idea of failure, but, if you really think about it, the only way not to fail is by not trying.”

Reacting angrily or aggressively to a situation usually makes it worse. Anger is often the byproduct of pain or fear. If you are mad, consider what underlying emotion is producing your irritation. Lashing out is damaging to relationships, and being right at all costs will not help you get what you want. If you respond inappropriately to someone, apologize promptly. And if you are on the receiving end of aggressive behavior, listen carefully and don't respond in kind. Use concise, neutral language. Concentrate on finding a solution rather than arguing your points.

“All communication, the most important thing in any business, is emotionally based.”

When conflicts arise between two of your employees, encourage them to speak to each other directly. If that fails, ask two of their colleagues to help facilitate a solution, or consider bringing in someone from outside the team. Asking “issue-resolution questions” may help the participants address the problem. For example, they might ask:

- “Have I, in some way, contributed to this issue?”
- “Is either of us trying to avoid responsibility?”
- “Am I really upset about this, or is it something else?”
- “Should I take this to human resources or bring in a third party?”

“Pressure can be positive. It helps people feel alive and productive, and it makes life interesting.”

Explaining your emotions is the highlight of a method called “carefrontation.” It calls for talking about an issue in a direct yet empathetic manner. This method brings problems into the open for honest, nonthreatening, forthright discussion. It requires sharing your feelings with co-workers in order to resolve issues, learn and grow.

## “Working Well with Others”

To get along and get ahead in the workplace, be willing to compromise, treat others with respect and be forthcoming. Solid professional relationships with your colleagues depend on building trust. Keep your promises. Only commit to things that you know you can deliver. When you cannot do something, explain why. Changing your mind is acceptable as long as you can provide reasons for your reversal.

“Sometimes, it seems that our business life can be best described as learning how to get from one problem to the next as gracefully as possible.”

“Blaming, shaming and complaining” alienate people and make them defensive. Blaming is a veiled attempt at dodging responsibility. Analyze your own role in a problem before you point the finger at a co-worker. Don’t resort to bullying or name-calling, or otherwise belittle or humiliate people. If you must give critical feedback, do so “without anger or attitude.”

“It has been said that we learn best by teaching and teach best what we most need to learn.”

Many factors can cause communication among teammates to break down. For example, you might disagree with a colleague about an issue and, therefore, decide to withhold your opinions.

Instead, voice your views and talk through the disagreement. After all, you may be right. Use neutral, gentle language that does not put others on the defensive. Know your subject thoroughly before you speak. Don’t jump to conclusions or assume that you know what others are thinking. Instead, ask questions to unearth their feelings and motivations.

## Handling a Crisis

Don’t think of problems as roadblocks. Rather, view them as chances to develop and improve. In this light, difficulties become challenges and crises become opportunities. As a manager, you must be prepared for a crisis. Although every crisis is unique, you can take steps to be ready for even a worst-case scenario. Consider these 10 principles when devising your strategy:

1. **“Experience is the best teacher”** – Ongoing learning is crucial. If your management team lacks the information or skills it needs to deal with a crisis, consult an expert.
2. **“Remain calm”** – Leaders must set a good example in difficult times.
3. **“Become idea prone”** – Use a crisis as an opening for brainstorming creative solutions.
4. **“Learn to communicate”** – Now, more than ever, you must get your messages across clearly and carefully.
5. **“Understand the grieving process”** – Give employees time to process their feelings about a difficult situation and to adjust to the new reality.
6. **“Find and express passion”** – Your staffers will draw strength from your enthusiasm.
7. **“Practice visualization”** – Envision your firm succeeding after the crisis. Encourage your staff to join you in this exercise.
8. **“Release your stress”** – Alleviate pressure by working out, or by discussing your feelings openly.
9. **“Create a sound strategic plan”** – Address several possible scenarios and include a “contingency clause.”
10. **“Talk about what does and doesn’t work”** – Openly share your concerns and opinions with a friend, colleague, mentor, professional coach or therapist.

“Taking responsibility for mistaken words and doing what is necessary to correct the situation is a sign of a great leader.”

Leaders must be accessible to their employees during a crisis. Understand the pressures your people are feeling. Some will respond well to stress, whereas others will succumb to despair. Help staffers deal with anxiety by recognizing it and then actively doing something about it.

## Motivating and Mentoring Your People

How can you motivate your employees to do their best day after day? Let them see your passion and excitement. Explain your vision and repeat it often. Define your purpose beyond earning a paycheck. Celebrate successes, big and small, and recognize their efforts. Bring workers into the process by asking their opinions and appreciating their contributions. Mentoring programs create a culture of encouragement while building teams and nurturing future leaders. Company mentoring programs (CMPs) match experienced professionals with new talent. The mentor’s role is to guide new employees to capitalize on their potential. Great mentors teach by example, become a sounding board for issues and ideas, and challenge those they coach to maximize their abilities. To develop a CMP at your organization, take these steps:

- Consider whether a CMP is appropriate for your company.
- Enlist your team’s support and become a mentor yourself.
- Analyze what skills your mentoring program should teach.
- Start small, with just a handful of participants, and build from there.
- Work with your own mentor and broadcast your experience.
- Gather feedback on other people’s mentoring experiences.
- Share it with everyone in your organization, for example, in a newsletter.
- When people begin asking for mentors, expand the program throughout your firm.

## Leadership Skills

Great leaders connect emotionally with their employees. They recognize effort, make strong hiring choices and know when to delegate. The best leaders put many of these tactics to use:

- Motivate employees by acknowledging their hard work in thank-you notes.
- Recognize the crucial role emotions play in the workplace.
- Show enthusiasm and passion for what you do.
- Continue to hone your communication skills.
- Treat your customers well. For example, provide a money-back guarantee.
- Involve your staffers in goal setting so they are invested in the company's results.
- Foster a work environment where people can speak openly about their fears.
- "Pursue failure." With each setback, you gain valuable experience and knowledge.
- Don't underestimate the power of having fun. It can improve your bottom line.
- Stay calm in stressful situations.
- Ask timely, relevant questions to facilitate problem solving.
- Find or organize a "mastermind group" of talented, experienced colleagues.
- Develop skills for dealing with difficult people.

## About the Author

**Barton Goldsmith**, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist, columnist, author and radio host. His articles have appeared in many respected publications, including the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and the *Los Angeles Business Journal*.

---

---