How Do I Manage My Emotions At Work?



Question from a distressed employee:

I find it difficult to manage my emotions at work. I have challenges in my personal life; these include personal health and family problems. These problems are nothing major but take a toll on my ability to deal with inane co-worker chit chat. When someone asks me how I am doing, It is difficult to offer a fake answer and say my weekend was great when it was not. I am not depressed- My feelings are legitimate and correlated to a difficult time. What can I say to co-workers when they ask about how I am doing?

Answer:

Experiencing Personal Challenges in the Workplace

How often have we been told to leave our personal problems at the door when at work? People carry personal issues around with them every day. Some people are better at hiding or managing or repressing them, but personal issues are always present. Most of the time, healthy people manage their feelings just fine. However, challenges associated with health may lower your ability to cope. Additional problems with children, marriage, or finance, make coping even more difficult.

Small Talk Fuels Day-to-Day Interactions

Within the Canadian workplace, the majority of workers want to focus on their jobs, enjoy small talk and avoid conflict. Each day people ask their co-workers rhetorical and superficial questions about the weather, etc. Usually co-workers do not seek deep conversation. At work, people typically use courtesy and convention to build and maintain relationships.

Resentment and Composure

TODAY'S EXPERT



Tara Orchard is a consultant, strategist, coach, trainer and writer. She combines psychology, personal development, social/emotional intelligence, learning strategies and technology trends with a capacity to deliver information and coach others successfully.

When you are gripped by stress, it can be especially difficult to maintain composure. Feelings of sadness, anger, and stress may lead to resentment for those who are smiling and asking ‘inane’ questions while you try to make it through the day.

At work, you must find a way to get your job done without negatively impacting the workplace. This does not mean the workplace is compassion-less. If co-workers do not know why your behavior betrays negative emotions, they cannot understand your reactions to their questions. Lack of understanding from co-workers will add even more stress to your day.

Options for Managing Co-worker Small Talk When Struggling with your Emotions

1) **Begin by owning the fact that this is your problem**. You must find a way to address your emotional state. Do not expect the workplace to bend to you. Determine if you want to share information about your situation with co-workers.

If you cannot manage your emotions even after sharing information, consider taking time off. If you find your performance at work is impacted, share information about your situation with your employer

2) **Change perspective and change the conversation**.

When faced with the question, ‘how is your day going’, make a choice: Take a breath, smile and say ‘everything is fine, thanks for asking’. Making this choice allows you to walk away without involving co-workers in your personal challenges. Augment this decision with a few techniques:

- Learn breathing techniques to help you manage your emotions.
- Smile. Even a fake smile may help.